VIGILIUS AND PELAGIUS

A STUDY ON THE HISTORY OF
THE ROMAN CHURCH
IN THE MID-6TH CENTURY

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I

THE BEGINNINGS OF POPE VIGILIUS

I have explained elsewhere[1] the vicissitudes that the Roman Church experienced during the time of King Athalaric (526-534) and the debates that gave rise to the papal elections of this period. Pope Boniface II, elevated to the apostolic see by the will of his predecessor much more than by the votes of the Roman clergy, owed his continued existence only to an unforeseen circumstance. If Dioscorus, his rival, had lived, it is probably he who would now be among the legitimate popes, and the name of Boniface himself would be found only among those of the antipopes. At that time, opinions were very divided in the old metropolis of the Roman world. The yoke of the Ostrogothic monarchs, which they officially endured, weighed heavily on the great aristocratic families, cruelly wounded recently by the double murder of Symmachus and Boethius; the clergy, too, remembered the death of Pope John in a Ravenna prison after a humiliating embassy to Constantinople. An opposition was forming but suppressed by the hand of Theodoric's young successor and the regent Amalasunta. However, the Goths were still the masters, and it was with them that the ambitious men eager to succeed had to reckon.

Among them was Deacon Vigilius. He was not just anyone. Born into an old senatorial family, the son of a consul, Vigilius had made his career in the clergy, while one of his brothers, Reparatus,

[1] *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire de l'Ecole française de Rome*, vol. III, p. 240, mai 1883.

pursued the path of secular honors. Pope Boniface II having been designated by his predecessor Felix IV, Vigilius had the idea of having himself adopted by him as his successor. It would have been a great success for Boniface, whose beginnings would thus have been legitimized *a posteriori*. Despite its extraordinary nature and its contradiction to canonical rules, the adoption took place, and even with a certain solemnity. But, as Boniface was in no hurry to die, there was time to reflect, and he was finally persuaded to reverse his decision; so that, when his succession became available on October 17, 532, Vigilius, stripped of his hopes, returned to the status of an ordinary deacon, and this at the highly expressed wish of the Roman clergy, found himself in a poor position to assert his candidacy.

This was no reason to despair. It is not known for sure whether he entered the running in the election that followed the death of Boniface, which was very turbulent. In any case, it was not he who was then elevated to the apostolic seat. The installation of John II (January 2, 533) further delayed the fulfillment of his ambitious desires.

However, the political situation was changing visibly. A wise man could not fail to see that the wind would not blow for long from Ravenna and the Goths. In September 533, Belisarius landed in Africa and took control of Carthage. It was all over for the Vandal kingdom. The following year, while the patrician completed his successes and strengthened his conquest. Athalaric died, worn out before his time by debauchery, and his mother, the regent Amalasuntha, would snatch, with her hand, the crown of the Amales from a prince unworthy of wearing it, but above all incapable of defending it. Theodatus, the new king, was eager to provide Justinian with a pretext for intervening in the affairs of the Goths and Italy. To avenge the assassination of Amalasuntha, the imperial armies seized Salona and Belisarius landed in Sicily. Theodatus had no courage except for crime; he suspected that his hand was not

strong enough to lift Theodoric's sword; we saw him engage in a pitiful diplomatic campaign, supported by considerations of Platonic philosophy. The days of the kingdom of the Goths were decidedly numbered.

Vigilius realized this early on and had himself appointed apocrisiarius (nuncio) to Constantinople. This was now the source of favor; it was important to reconnoiter the situation, erase the bad impressions of previous years, and transform himself into a pleasant figure. It is not known exactly when he was sent to the imperial court. What is certain is that he was there when Pope Agapitus, successor to John II, came himself, sent as an ambassador by the ridiculous Theodatus. Agapitus was an honest man, as enlightened as he was pious,[2] descended from an ancient Roman family whose members divided their time between what remained of official honors and the highest offices of the Church. His father, a titular priest of the Church of SS. John and Paul, had perished, in the time of Pope Symmachus, in one of the riots stirred up by the supporters of the antipope Lawrence.[3] A friend of the illustrious Cassiodorus, he had formed with him the project of a high school of theological science, whose teachers would have taught Sacred Scripture and the works of the Fathers; a rich library had already been assembled for this purpose. It later passed, at least in part, into the hands of another illustrious pope, Saint Gregory the Great, who belonged to the same family as Agapitus.[4]

It would have been desirable for such a pontiff to have remained at the head of the Roman Church in the midst of the impending crises. God did not will it. Agapitus died in Constantinople on April 22, 536. Although his diplomatic mission had failed, he had ensured that the rank and authority of the Roman pontiff were highly respected. A bishop of dubious faith, Anthimus, already holding the

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[2] 'In regulis ecclesiasticis apprime eruditus.' (Liberatus, *Brev.*,c. 21).
[3] *Liber pontificalis*, n. 78 & 94 (Bianchini).
[4] De Rossi, *Inscr. christ.*, vol. II, p. 16 & 28.

See of Trebizond, had succeeded, despite the cannons and thanks to the favor of Empress Theodora, in having himself appointed Patriarch of Constantinople. Agapitus deposed him, to the applause of all the orthodox of the Greek Empire, and, with the consent of the emperor himself, he consecrated his successor, the priest Menas.

It was a great success for the apostolic see, and at the same time the revelation of great fortitude combined with assured credibility. But Agapitus survived his triumph only a few days and it soon became unclear whether it would last. A patriarch doesn't fall alone. In this case, Anthime was the hope of the immense Monophysite party. The latter, supported by strong majorities in Egypt and Syria, with talented men at his disposal, such as Patriarch Severus, supported by hordes of tenacious and indomitable monks, had not lost hope of taking over the leadership of the Byzantine Church. Since the accession of Justinian I, and especially since Justinian had applied his powerful and hard tenacity to the pursuit of the unity of the Church, it had been necessary to retreat. But much was expected of Theodora and her empire, based on her husband's wishes. With her help, a devoted prelate had been installed in the seat of the first patriarch, the pope of the Greek church. It was hard to be stopped when one thought one had won everything. The sudden death of Pope Agapitus revived these hopes almost immediately after they had been dashed. Undoubtedly, the successor of Anthimus hastened to pursue the execution of the pope's sentence: in a council held in May 536, a few days after the death of Agapitus, he rained down ecclesiastical condemnations on Anthimus, Severus, and other Monophysite leaders. The entire pope's retinue was summoned to this solemn meeting and surrounded with the greatest honors: Italian bishops, deacons of Rome, papal notaries, all made a very good showing at the Council of Menas. But this tribunal was obliged to proceed in absentia;

though the accused were summoned and sought after, they refrained from appearing.

This was because they, for their part, were attending to their own business. While the orthodox patriarch sat enthroned in Hagia Sophia, surrounded by the court episcopate, always largely represented in Constantinople, and the companions of the deceased pope, the Acephali[5] were seeking to secure a living pope who could help them, in a more or less direct way, to restore their situation. Theodora, their usual ally, could not fail to help them take advantage of this unexpected opportunity.

The Roman deacons Theophanes and Pelagius had remained in Constantinople and were taking part in the council; but the apocrisiarius Vigilius was hastening to return to Rome. Perhaps he had claimed the ostensible mission of bringing the mortal remains of Agapitus back to his church. In any case, he had another, secret and profitable one. For a long time already, he had been Theodora's favorite. A husband, even an emperor, cannot refuse everything at once. The Empress had been clever enough to comply willingly with Pope Agapitus' demands; now her turn had come: her complacency was to be recognized by allowing her to interfere in the appointment of the new pope. Who knows, moreover, whether Vigilius, skilled at maneuvering between diverse currents, had not succeeded in winning all the imperial favors, those of the emperor as well as the empress? What is certain is that he landed in Italy with letters for Belisarius and his wife Antonina, and that these letters were such that they brooked no objection. It was Vigilius who was to be Agapitus's successor.

Under what precise conditions had this intervention been purchased? For anyone who has studied Vigilius' character, for anyone who takes into account his conduct before and after his elevation to the pontificate, no stipulation can be ruled out by the

[5] TL note: Acephali (Headless) applied to several sects that purported to have no leader. For further information see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acephali.

preliminary question. Vigilius was capable of promising anything, or at least of holding out hope for anything. In the circumstances, dealing with two masters whose demands were at least divergent, he had no reason to be difficult; of course, when it came to execution, he would always be entitled to wait until the Emperor and Empress had agreed to formulate their demands.

Later, when a well-organized party had formed against him, also unscrupulous in its choice of means and prolific in its writing, a letter[6] was circulated addressed to the three great leaders of Monophysitism, Thedosius, Anthimus, and Severus, in which the new pope demonstrated his complete conformity of views with them and condemned the principal articles of orthodox dogma. But the impartial historian, who has the right to distrust official formulas and to read between the lines, also has the duty not to be credulous with regard to secret documents, easily apocryphal, to which one often resorts, among party members, when controversies are aroused a little heatedly.

Moreover, whether or not Vigilius wrote the letter attributed to him a few years later, it is certain that the circumstances of his elevation to the pontificate could not fail to make him appear as the damned soul of Theodora and the docile instrument of the Monophysite party.

This elevation, in fact, suffered certain difficulties. However diligent the imperial candidate had been, he had not been able to arrive in Rome before the news of the pope's death. Theodatus, instinctively, felt that he had not a moment to lose. Naples had fallen into the hands of Belisarius, but Rome was still in his power. He hastened to have the subdeacon Silverius appointed, a person still relatively young in the hierarchy, but whom he assumed to be devoted to his interests.

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[6] Liberatus, *Brev.*, 22; Victor Tunun. *Chron. ad ann.* 543. — There is also talk of large sums of money.

Silverius was the son of Pope Hormisdas,[7] whose great deeds and merits must have left a vivid imprint on the memory of the Roman population.[8] The clergy, however, had little appetite for this interference from an already discredited power; the priests refused to sign the decree of election, which had been drawn up according to the usual procedures. Theodatus overcame this opposition; he found enough people, clerical and lay, to acclaim the candidate of his choice, and bishops to confer ordination on him. Silverius was installed, given possession of the Lateran and the churches of Rome. The dissidents were then approached: willingly or against it, everyone signed,[9] some to avoid a schism, others out of fear, and a few perhaps because the new pope was able to obtain forgiveness for the irregularity of his election. The fact remains that, when Theodatus was overthrown by the indignant Goths, when Vitiges, the valiant leader they acclaimed to lead them against the Byzantines, had decided, for strategic reasons, to leave Rome prey to Belisarius, there had been, for several months, a pope elected, consecrated, installed, and even accepted by the entire population.

A great setback for Vigilius, who appeared in Rome, undoubtedly following Belisarius, in December 536, but only entered as a simple deacon, although he had had the hope of entering as pope. His disappointment, however, did not last long.

While the Greek hero was preparing the ancient walls of Rome to withstand the onslaught of Vitiges' army, while he repulsed with intelligent bravery the first attacks of the besiegers, a plot was hatched against Silverius. It would be naive to believe that Vigilius' hand had nothing to do with it. It was soon said that, to overcome

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[7] *Liber pontificalis*, *n*. 97.

[8] M. de Rossi, *Inscr. christ.*, vol. II, p. 130, recently found the epitaph of Hormisdas, composed by Silverius himself; the history of his pontificate is outlined in rapid and expressive strokes.

[9] *L. p.*, l. c.

Belisarius' scruples, he employed arguments that Greek virtues, from the earliest times, had not been accustomed to resist.

The patrician had not settled on the Palatine. He resided on the Pincian Hill, near the main point of attack, as Vitiges' enterprises were generally directed towards the Via Salaria.[10] Silverius resided at the other end of the city, in his Lateran palace, very close to the Asinaria Gate. He was accused of having wanted to surrender this gate to the besiegers. To this end, skilled forgers fabricated a letter he supposedly wrote to the King of the Goths. This supposed document was then intercepted, and from then on, they had in their hands a piece of evidence against the unfortunate pope. It seems that Belisarius hesitated to get involved in this intrigue and even suggested to Silverius a way out, by personally making the concessions to the Empress that she expected from Vigilius.[11] This would indeed have been a clever maneuver and would have disconcerted, at least for the time being, the ambitious deacon's schemes. But to comply with Theodora's wishes, he would have had to stifle the voice of his conscience. This is what Silverius refused to do. He remembered that he was the guardian of orthodoxy, and he no doubt found, in the memory of his illustrious father, an encouragement to firmly maintain the traditional faith against the theological machinations of the Greeks. Convinced that by refusing he was running into danger, he refused energetically. However, to deny the rumors of treason that were beginning to circulate, he withdrew to the Aventine, near the Church of Santa Sabina, that is, to a place where he could obviously do nothing against the Asinaria Gate.

There he was sent for to appear before the emperor's representative. Despite the fears of his entourage, who urged him,

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[10] On Silverius' testimony, see *L. p.*, n.100; Liberatus, *Brev.*, 22; Procopius , *Bell. Goth.*, l, 25.

[11] This is what Liberatus and Silverius's biographer report, independently of each other, in *L. p.*

not without reason, not to trust the oaths of the Greeks, he went to the Pincian Palace. At this first meeting, no violence was attempted. Belisarius hesitated at the moment of committing such a flagrant iniquity. A few days later, summoned again, Silverius descended the slopes of the Aventine, agitated by sinister forebodings and commending his cause to God. His retinue was numerous: Vigilius, among others, accompanied him. The procession entered the *Domus Pinciana*, formerly inhabited by the illustrious family of the Anicii Probi. The main hall was, according to custom, divided into several compartments by large hangings. Belisarius's men held the Roman clerics in the first and second compartments and allowed no one to enter the back of the palace except Silverius and Vigilius.

What happened between the Pope and the Byzantine general? We do not know. What is certain is that two subdeacons, John and Xystus, who were part of the plot, were soon summoned inside. They undoubtedly knew what they had to do. John approached the Pope, removed his pallium, and, leading him aside, threw a monk's habit over his shoulders. Xystus took it upon himself to announce the event to the clerics who remained in the antechamber: "The Lord Pope," he told them, "Is deposed and made a monk." Terrified, the clerics fled and dispersed.

It was the middle of March. A few days later, Belisarius summoned the clergy and ordered them to hold a new election. Some resisted or objected, but the majority gave in. On March 29, 537, Vigilius was ordained pope.[12]

The ambitious are not always incompetent. They even become honest once they no longer have any interest in not being so. One, who has crawled very low to get there, stands up straight as soon as

[12] Some historians distinguish here between a first period in which Vigilius was antipope and a second in which he was legitimate pope; this period would begin with the death of Silverius. Contemporary documents do not indicate that this distinction was made at that time. On the initial date of Vigilius's pontificate, see de Rossi, *Inscr. christ.*, vol. I, p. 482. A Roman inscription from June 537 names Vigilius *beatissimus papa* (l. c.).

he arrives, speaks proudly of his conscience, and makes his astonished patrons feel that they must reckon with him. This happened before the sixth century and even after. Vigilius had barely taken the seat of Saint Peter when he was already trying to circumvent and postpone the fulfillment of his promises. Pretexts were not lacking. In Rome, the people had been impressed by the rumors circulating about Silverius and his relations with the Goths. Reassured in this regard by the election of a pope notoriously devoted to the new regime,[13] he was in no way disposed to support or even tolerate a change of direction in the spiritual affairs of Christendom. For almost a hundred years, the Romans had become accustomed to seeing the Pope fight to maintain the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon and the tradition of Saint Leo against all Eastern intrigues. The attitude of the other Western churches was no different. In Africa, although they had only taken an indirect part in the controversies over the Incarnation, in Upper Italy, Gaul, and Spain, the work of Chalcedon was considered sacred and any attempt to call it into question would have been severely protested. Vigilius could therefore argue the need to wait, to avoid arousing formidable opposition by rushing things. Let us also hope that he had the courage to assert, alongside the opinions of others, his true personal convictions, re-tempered at the tomb of the Apostle Peter, whose successor, although unworthy, he found himself to be.[14]

Moreover, the situation in Italy, and in Rome in particular, was and remained critical enough to excuse the pope for thinking of his own flock before going to revive party quarrels in the East. Finally, Justinian, less eager than Theodora to restore imperial favor to the

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[13] Vigilius's brother, Reparatus, a Roman senator, had been taken hostage to Ravenna by Vitiges, along with a large number of his colleagues. Shortly after Vigilius's election, Vitiges sent orders from his camp to massacre these unfortunate men. But Reparatus, second in command, managed to escape and took refuge in Liguria (Procopius , *Bell*, *Goth.*, I, 11, 26).

[14] "Etsi indignus, vicarius sum b. Petri apostoli, quomodo fuerunt antecessores mei sanctissimus Agapitus and Silverius." *L. p.*, n. 103.

Monophysites, could only encourage a policy of peace and conciliation. The apocrisiarius Pelagius, who had rallied early to the new pope and was highly regarded at court, was working in the same direction.

In short, religious peace was maintained. Despite the intrigues of the Empress and the Monophysite party, the Roman Church did not have to pay the price of Vigilius's ambition through spiritual disaster. He even managed to maneuver so well that, without falling out with Theodora, he was able to send Justinian and Patriarch Menas letters of absolute orthodoxy, in which he adhered to all the condemnations pronounced against the opponents of the Council of Chalcedon.[15]

The siege of Rome having been lifted in the spring of 538, Vigilius was able to easily resume the epistolary relations of the apostolic see with the Western churches. We see him corresponding with the bishops of Arles, Caesarius and Auxanius, with the Frankish kings Theodebert and Childebert, and with the metropolitan of Braga, Profuturus. In Rome, he displayed great zeal in repairing the evils of war. All around the city, and particularly on the northern and eastern sides, the sanctuaries of the martyrs and the adjoining cemeteries had been odiously ravaged. Vigilius hastened to repair

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[15] Jaffé, 910, 911, Migne, *P. L.*, vol. LXIX, p. 21, 25. Cardinal Pitra published in the *Spicilegium Solesmense*, vol. IV, p. XII, a profession of faith whose author is not indicated in the manuscript from which it was taken. The editor believed he could attribute it to Pope Vigilius. In my opinion, the last paragraph should first be deleted. *Secundum igitur — nihil esse potest*, a theological dissertation in a completely different style from the preceding one; the profession of faith ends quite naturally with the phrase *Quicumque autem aliud senserit, crediderit, praedicaverit, hunc anathematizat sancta et universalis Ecclesia Dei*. With this deletion made, everything else, including the sentence I just quoted, is found in the letters of Pope Pelagius I: the beginning, in his profession of faith sent to Childebert (Migne, vol. c, p. 407); the end, in his profession of faith *ad universum populum Dei* (*ibid.*, p. 399). It was not, moreover, a clumsy compiler who brought these two pieces together; they complement and presuppose one another. Cardinal Pitra's manuscript therefore presents us with the *fides* of Pelagius in its original and complete state, whereas the two letters cited had each retained only a part of it.

these very popular places of worship, for which Pope Damasus had once shown so much concern. Several inscriptions still bear witness to this pious care.[16] For his part, Belisarius had wanted to consecrate the triumph of his arms through charitable foundations and donations to churches. He had a hospice built in the *Via Lata*, and dedicated, in the Basilica of St. Peter, two gold candelabra and a large cross of the same metal, adorned with precious stones and bearing the commemoration of his victories.[17] The Romans, breathing again after a long siege, soon had, according to some accounts, the pleasant spectacle of a sort of triumph. After the capitulation of Ravenna, Belisarius brought them King Vitiges, a prisoner, with his entire family. He was received by the Pope in the Basilica of Julius and was solemnly sworn to be taken safe and sound to Constantinople.[18]

The Muse herself seemed to want to cast a certain luster on this so sadly inaugurated pontificate. She was, it is true, a poor Muse, and one can believe that Virgilius did not shudder in his grave when, on April 6, 544, the subdeacon Arator offered the Pope, in the *presbyterium* of St. Peter's, his translation of the Acts of the Apostles into Latin couplets. In those sad times, the work seemed marvelous. The author, moreover, was no ordinary cleric; descended from a noble Ligurian family, he had pursued a career of honor during the reign of Theodoric and obtained the title of *comes domesticorum*. Like the illustrious Cassiodorus, but with less grandeur, he was completing in the church a career begun in another arena. His poem, which is no worse than those of other sixth-century

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[16] De Rossi, *Bull.*, 1880, p. 40; 1881, p. 41, etc.

[17] *Lib. pont.*, n. 102.

[18] The *Liber pontificalis* (l. c.) is the only document where Vitiges' passage to Rome is mentioned. Since Procopius says nothing about it, it seems rather doubtful, because the life of Vigilius, in the *L. p.*, is not a very reliable document. However, since this is a Roman fact, I did not feel it necessary to disregard this vestige of a local tradition. Belisarius may have embarked at Porto, instead of leaving directly from Ravenna for Constantinople.

versifiers,[19] was read by the author himself and with great fanfare in the basilica of Saint Peter in Chains on the Esquiline Hill. What remained of the learned Romans delighted in applauding him. Some old consular officers, those who corrected the manuscripts of Horace and Livy, perhaps remembered the temple of Apollo on the Palatine and its libraries where, in the time of Augustus, poets and orators recited their works before an academy of intellectuals.

These were the works of peace. The ancient shadows perhaps smiled there; but Pope Vigilius had little time to indulge in this smile: other shadows rose before him, sad and threatening.

The unfortunate Silverius, dragged from exile to exile, overwhelmed by humiliation and anguish, had died on a solitary island in the Tyrrhenian Sea.[20] Belisarius had first sent him to Lycia, to the city of Patara. But the bishop of that city, frightened at having such an exile to watch over, had come to the emperor and filled the palace with his protests. He had to listen to him and promise to give Silverius a fair trial. He had therefore been sent back to Italy, despite the opposition of the apocrisiarius Pelagius, who, throughout this affair, showed himself very devoted to Vigilius. The latter was greatly terrified when he learned that his victim was about to return and that light was about to be shed on his intrigues. He did so well, however, that Belisarius, surrounded by his wife Antonina,[21] allowed him to secure the person of his predecessor; the poor exile, handed over to the hands of Vigilius' henchmen, was transported to the island of Palmaria, within sight of Cape Circe. There he tasted for a time "the bread of tribulation and the water of anguish," and finally died, of hunger, some say, of exhaustion, others say, leaving the author of his disgrace a rich legacy of remorse.

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[19] Migne, *Patr*, *lat*, vol. LXVIII.

[20] On the end of Pope Silverius, see *Lib. pont*, n. 101, 106; Liberatus, c. 22; Procopius, *Hist. arcana*, 1.

[21] Procopius (l. c.) seems to blame everything on Antonius; but the ecclesiastical documents already cited agree in accusing Vigilius. Note that the two passages in the *Liber pontificalis* give two distinct testimonies, both Roman.

This was not, it seems,[22] Vigilius' only victim. He was blamed for the murder of one of his notaries, killed by a slap. The feat was repeated by Tiberius, who was said to have killed a man with a flick of the wrist; Vigilius, indeed, was a man of great physical vigor. It was also said that a young man, Asterius, to whom he had granted the hand of his niece, having one day had the misfortune to displease him, he had him seized and beaten with rods until he died. These last facts are known to us only from the *Liber pontificalis*, which, in its account of Vigilius, is far from being a model of accuracy. However, it is appropriate to recognize here the echo of the rumors which, true or false, were circulating in Rome about Pope Vigilius, compromising his reputation and calling into question his popularity.

And yet circumstances would have demanded a truly popular pope, and popular for the right reason, a Leo, a Gregory. The siege of 537, the war of Vitiges, were mere games compared to the approaching catastrophes. The remnants of the Goth nation had drawn together and grouped around a hero; the struggle began again throughout Italy. It was to be the last: but how hard-fought the success would be! Totila held the field; Florence, Naples, Tibur had fallen into his hands; Rome herself, if not besieged, at least very closely held. The threat of war was joined by that of famine and also that of the plague, born on the battlefields of recent years. Staying in the old metropolis was becoming hard for those who lacked a strong soul. Vigilius, despite his displays of tenacity and even energy in certain encounters, could not consider himself a hero. The complaints of the people rose up against him, each day more bitter and more resounding. On the other hand, his apocrisiarius Pelagius, who had just arrived from the imperial city, had, by his reckless zeal, ignited a new theological conflict in the East in which the emperor found himself in need of the pope.

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[22] *Liber pontif.*, n. 103, 106.

II

THE NUNCIATURE OF PELAGIUS

On November 22, 545, there was a great commotion around the Basilica of Saint Cecilia, in Trastevere. It was the anniversary of the dedication of this church: the solemn station was being celebrated there; the Pope, assisted by all the high clergy, officiated in person. The ceremony was not yet over when the entire district filled with soldiers; posts were placed at the exits; an imperial official, to whom this troop obeyed, crossed the atrium, entered the basilica, and, pushing through the agitated crowd, presented the Pope with orders summoning him to Constantinople without the slightest delay. Vigilius seemed surprised; he was about to protest but was not allowed to do so. Before the congregation had time to get their bearings, he took the road to the Tiber, not far away, under heavy escort. A ship was waiting; he and a few people were made to board. Meanwhile, the crowd grew on the shore. The thirsty faithful had left the church following the pontiff, groaning and demanding that he at least give them the blessing with which the liturgy usually ended.[23] Vigilius turned towards them and, from the ship's deck, recited over the bewildered congregation the prayer he was accustomed to pronounce more calmly from the episcopal pulpit. Meanwhile, the imperial secretary urged the sailors on, and they vigorously urged the ship to sail. The ship finally got under way. Then came another concert, for the pope did not have everyone's sympathy, and the odious crowd that "hates the condemned" had judged its time had come. Curses and cries of death mingled with the noise of the oars; a hail of missiles, stones, sticks, pieces of crockery, rained down on the ship. Finally, he, pushed by the

[23] The prayer *ad complendum*, now called *Post-Communion*.

current and the oars of the galley slaves, found himself out of reach of these madmen; the cries of plague and famine were lost in the distance; the Pope peacefully completed his journey to Porto, where he was sent to set sail for Syracuse.

It is the life of Vigilius, in the *Liber pontificalis*, that has preserved for us these details of his departure from Rome. This biography, as I have already said, is not always accurate: but this is an event that took place in Rome and witnessed by a large crowd. One might believe that the outward appearance was strongly captured by contemporary imaginations and fairly well preserved by tradition, which, moreover, took root quite early, with the life of Vigilius appearing to have been written, at most, fifty years after his death. But what was more difficult to distinguish, and what the biographer does not seem to have clearly seen, were the underlying events, the hidden motives of this politico-religious coup de théâtre. He attributes everything to Theodora, ardent to avenge the quarrel with Anthimus, his favorite patriarch, and to demand that Vigilius fulfill his promises. This is how the Roman populace understood imperial policy and its incessant attempts at conciliation with the Monophysites of the East. In reality, it was, at least officially, something quite different. Justinian wanted to have the pope under his control, to gain his support in the campaign he had just launched concerning the three chapters. Vigilius himself, although little willing to get involved in this theological quagmire, must have felt ill at ease in a city where he was only half-loved, where many people reproached him for being an intruder and a parricide. Totila pressed the siege of Rome with learned and stubborn patience; Byzantine weapons were everywhere in Italy. Once the Gothic regime was reestablished in Rome, wouldn't the victor have scores to settle with Justinian's pope? I would therefore be inclined to believe that Vigilius only put up a formal resistance, that he allowed himself to be kidnapped without too much displeasure, and even that the scene at Saint Cecilia could well have been arranged with him, in

order to save appearances and spare him the trouble of being seen as a fugitive and a deserter.

Arriving in Syracuse, he hastened to organize a convoy of food supplies[24] to supply his episcopal city, cut off from all land routes, and whose approaches, via the Tiber, were beginning to be very closely monitored. The Roman Church possessed a considerable "patrimony" in Sicily, from which the Pope easily obtained a large quantity of wheat. The flotilla, loaded with this convoy, appeared, at the beginning of the spring of the year 546, in sight of the fortress of Porto, still occupied by a Byzantine detachment. Unfortunately, Totila had a camp in the vicinity, from where the Sicilian ships were also sighted. An ambush was set and the entire convoy fell into the hands of the besiegers. Among the clergymen who were escorting him back were a Roman priest, Ampliatus, *vice-dominus* of the Pope, who had been commissioned to take over the administration of the episcopal palace, and the Bishop of Saint Rufina, Valentinus, charged with replacing the Pope in his absence in the direction of spiritual affairs. This prelate, brought before the King of the Goths, was subjected to an interrogation, and Totila, judging that he was not answering sincerely, had both of his hands cut off.

Thus failed the Pope's efforts to come to the aid of his suffering fellow citizens. As for the spiritual government of the Roman Church and the moral leadership of the besieged population, it had already, or at least soon, passed into the hands of Deacon Pelagius, who had returned from his nunciature in Constantinople. We shall soon see that Pelagius extricated himself with the greatest honor from this difficult situation. For the moment, we must abandon Rome, return to Constantinople, and resume the sequence of events since the death of Pope Agapitus.

The deacons Theophanes and Pelagius were among the Roman clerics who had followed Agapitus to Constantinople in 536. After the Pope’s death, they attended the Council of Menas and signed its

[24] On this subject, see *Lib. pont.*, n. 105; Procopius, *Bell. Goth.*, III, 15.

documents. By this time, Vigilius had already left for Rome. It is likely that he came to an agreement with Pelagius before his departure and that he persuaded him to accept the position of apocrisiarius. In any case, we find him exercising these functions very shortly afterward.

It was at the Council of 536 that Pelagius was first mentioned. Like Vigilius, he came from the highest ranks of Roman society. His father, a certain John, had formerly served as vicar and governed one of the two administrative dioceses of Italy. He himself was a man of Roman stamp, energetic, enterprising, inflexible in ordinary times, yet capable of not needlessly stumbling against necessity. He devoted himself to the fortunes of Pope Vigilius and rendered him great services, without feeling much esteem for this personage, to whom he was, in every respect, far superior. But Vigilius was the pope, and a friend of the emperor. Now, the union of these two powers represented, in Pelagius' eyes, an essential condition of greatness and strength for both. Not only were his zeal for the Roman Church and his attachment to the Empire very compatible, but they also mutually relied on and called for each other. Vigilius made him his advisor, his confidant, his substitute. Except during the last months, Pelagius was constantly in favor with him; in certain cases, he showed himself to be at least as pope-like as the pope himself. His intelligence, his firmness, his audacity gave some consistency to a very disjointed pontificate; it was thanks to him that the Roman Church managed to cut a rather honorable figure in the troubled circumstances that Italy and the East were then experiencing. After Vigilius' death, the episcopal pallium came to rest, as if of its own accord, on his shoulders; he had well deserved it.

Left alone in Constantinople after the departure of Agapitus' companions, he endeavored to cultivate the good graces of Justinian and Theodora, and succeeded, after a short time, in establishing a very strong position for himself in this regard. When the emperor

decided to send Silverius back to Italy and have him tried properly, Pelagius had enough confidence in his own credit to throw himself into the execution of this order by setting Theodora against Justinian.[25] He was only partially successful, it is true, but his position was not shaken by this bold act. Justinian consulted him in all matters concerning religion, and even in the selection of bishops for major sees. Thus, as early as the year 539, we find him charged with appointing a bishop to Alexandria.

This was no easy position. For over fifty years, the See of Saint Mark had not had a truly Catholic incumbent. The official patriarchs, who accepted Zeno's Henoticon, were excommunicated in Rome and hated in Egypt, for opposite reasons. In Rome, they were criticized for not being Chalcedonians; in Alexandria, they were suspected of not having a sufficient horror of the Council of Chalcedon. Thus, there were no fewer than three distinct denominations, not to mention the heretical remnants of the ancient sects, a swarm with which Egypt had always been fertile. First, the Catholics properly so-called, a small flock faithful to the cult of Bishop Proterius, assassinated by the Monophysites in 457; Since the death of Emperor Anastasius (518), they had been awaiting the consequences, difficult to draw in their country, of the orthodox restoration carried out in Constantinople; the high imperial officials gave them more good words than effective evidence of official protection. The opposing camp was formed by the anti-Chalcedonian Monophysites, aligned under the banner of *Saint* Dioscorus, and described as acephali, because their intransigence had not allowed them to be brought into the fold of which the Henoticon was the gate. Between these two parties floated the Henotists, mixed Monophysites, who, in essence, condemned the decrees of Pope Leo and the Council of Chalcedon, provided that they were never discussed. Supporters of prudent silence, as long as it had been a political institution, they had been deprived, since

[25] Liberatus, *Brev.*, 22.

Justin and Justinian, of an official protectorate, at least in Constantinople. In Egypt, they were not yet being harassed, but they sensed the coming crisis and instinctively gravitated toward the large acephali battalions. Their leader, Patriarch Timothy III, having died (536), the situation became unexpectedly complicated.[26] Two great theologians of the Monophysite party, Severus, ex-patriarch of Antioch, and Julian, bishop of Halicarnassus, had been in Alexandria for some time, brought together by a common exile. They soon began to quarrel. Julian, a Eutychian of the old school, claimed that the flesh of Christ had been incorruptible; since the humanity of the Savior had, in the primitive system, no serious reality, this was a necessary consequence. Severus, less advanced, was, on this point, closer to orthodox theology: he subjected the flesh of Christ to the general laws of corruptibility to which all material substance belongs. I need not deny that they both admitted the incorruption of the body of Jesus Christ; the quarrel was confined to the region of metaphysical possibilities. This was no reason why it should not degenerate, in a milieu like that of Alexandria, into beatings, massacres, and episcopal competitions. Timothy's last years had been very troubled; After him, the Corrupters and the Incorrupters each appointed a patriarch: the Corrupters, with official support, elected a certain Theodosius; but the Incorrupters, patronized by the monks, acclaimed Gaianus. They initially had the upper hand.

It was customary in Alexandria for the deceased patriarch to be watched over on his funeral bed by his future successor; the latter, at the moment of burial, would take the deceased's right hand and place it on his head; then he would remove the pallium of Saint Mark and place it around his neck. It was after this ceremony that he definitively became patriarch. Theodosius sought in vain to celebrate this rite of transmission of power; the Gaianians put a stop to it. Excited by the monks, the population flocked to the

[26] On these Alexandrian events, see Liberatus, *Brev.*, 19, 20, 23.

appropriate places; the Theodosians were stunned, the officials were routed, and Gaianus was enthroned, to the great joy of the "true Christians of Egypt."

This idyll, however, did not last long. After three months, the chamberlain Narses, a man predestined for great fortune, arrived in Alexandria and was, for the time being, the instrument of the energetic Theodora. Force remained in government; Gaianus was forced into exile. He was sent to Carthage, and from there to Sardinia, and Theodosius was installed in his place.

It was not without difficulty. For several days, it was necessary to wage battle and massacre part of the population. The streets were full of corpses and abandoned weapons; on this sad battlefield, the imperial troops themselves had left many victims. From the rooftops, the women continued the fight, hurling a hail of stones, furniture, and projectiles of all kinds. It was necessary to resort to burning to quell the riot. The official triumph of the Corruptors was paid for by the ruin of part of Alexandria. Once order was restored, Theodosius opened his churches; but only civil servants attended. Instinctively, the entire city was for the opponents. After a year spent officiating before the uniforms, the unfortunate patriarch was summoned to Constantinople and left his Egyptian hell. Arriving at court, he heard, not without astonishment, being asked to break even more openly with the Monophysite party: Justinian had flattered himself that he would make him accept the volume of Leo and the Council of Chalcedon.

Theodosius, too well paid to know the Alexandrian world and the way theological controversy was practiced there, declined the invitation extended to him and left it to others to rally these fanatics to absolute orthodoxy. He was assured, under the name of exile, a retreat in a monastery on the Bosphorus; he hastened to go there and lived in peace for some more thirty years, without reclaiming his See of Alexandria.

One can judge from this account, drawn from the recollections of eyewitnesses, the difficulties of the Chalcedonian restoration in a country like Egypt. For a position as dangerous as that of Catholic patriarch, competitors must have been rare. Pelagius found one. He was a monk from Tabenna, named Paul, an Egyptian by race, one of those men who are all the more insensitive to the blows of the stick that fall on the backs of others because they themselves feel themselves subject to this kind of argument. Dragonnades[27] were to be expected and even prepared. Neither Pelagius nor Paul were people to shrink from this prospect. The new patriarch was ordained by Menas in Constantinople, in the presence of the Roman deacon and the representatives of the bishops of Antioch and Jerusalem; then he embarked for Alexandria.

He was not held in high esteem there. If he had been in Constantinople, just in time to receive the succession from Theodosius, it was because of a lawsuit brought against him by his monks, who had serious complaints about him. Upon seeing him return, the Alexandrians felt that the time of imperial tolerance had passed and that action would be taken against them without a shadow of a doubt. Moreover, the new patriarch had been given the broadest powers. He was tasked with dismissing the entire Egyptian episcopate and forming another that accepted the Council of Chalcedon. All officials, military and civil, owed him blind obedience, under penalty of dismissal.

The terror was such that everyone bowed; the monks themselves (hide yourselves, shadows of Dioscorus and Timothy Elurus), the monks themselves signed Leo's hated tome and the harmful Council of Chalcedon.

But the opposition reformed beneath the surface. There were secret channels through which the former leaders of the party communicated. One day, the patriarch discovered letters written in

[27] TL note: 'Dragonnades' were French soldiers sent to force convert Huguenots to the Catholic faith in 17th Century.

Coptic and addressed by one of his deacons, Psoius[28], to the *magister militum* Elias; his deeds and actions were recounted and commented on.

Psoius was a man so corrupted that one could avenge one's own insults against him by giving the appearance of defending the public interest. Instead of attacking him head-on, Paul limited himself to demanding an account of certain financial matters. His records not being in order, he was handed over to the judge and a report was sent to the emperor. But before the reply could reach Alexandria from Constantinople, the deacon was executed in his prison, with great displays of cruelty.

A cry of horror arose. Psoius had influential children and relatives; they became so agitated that the emperor wanted to get to the bottom of the matter. The Augustan prefect, Rhodon, declared that the execution had taken place at the request of the bishop, whose instructions required him to obey him in all things. The bishop, for his part, claimed that he had not asked for anything. And, indeed, he proved that the request had been presented to the praetor by a certain Arsenius, a municipal magistrate. He was a former Samaritan, a corrupt man, who appears to have gone a little further in this matter than was reasonable, following the patriarch's wishes. Arsenius and Rhodon were tried and executed. As for Bishop Paul, despite his denials, his complicity appeared to be sufficiently established to make it impossible to keep him in his seat. Justinian handed him over to the ecclesiastical judges.

In this instance, Pelagius must have found himself somewhat compromised, having gone to such lengths to have the unfortunate patriarch appointed. He nevertheless accepted the situation and even allowed himself to be appointed president of the commission tasked with deposing him. This tribunal met in Gaza. Pelagius was assisted by the bishops of Antioch, Jerusalem, and Ephesus; other

[28] TL note: '[I believe] Duchesne is using a Latinized form of this name which is the Coptic name Pishoy ⲡⲓϣⲟⲓ (other form 'Psoi') Greek form 'Paisios' Παίσιος.

prelates were also summoned. The Patriarch of Alexandria appeared: his pallium was removed, and a certain Zoilus was ordained in his place, who managed to maintain his position, with the support of the authorities.[29]

This sad story is nevertheless apt to demonstrate the importance of Deacon Pelagius in the emperor's councils and in the ecclesiastical world of the East. The Roman Church might have wished for his influence to be exercised in happier circumstances, but it was difficult for it to be felt more strongly.

The Gaza voyage provided the occasion for another affair in which the apocrisiarius' favor was once again highlighted. In the orthodox monasteries of Palestine, the monks, finding themselves all in agreement on the Incarnation, had imagined disputing for and against Origen.[30] For a good three centuries, this quarrel, endemic in the country, had occasionally flared up there. Saint Sabas, the founder of the famous convent of Mar-Saba, near Jerusalem, was greatly concerned about these controversies. He had been seen to act energetically against certain monks who, not content with blaming human weakness for the doctrinal eccentricities of the famous Alexandrian, persisted in defending them or even transforming them into dogmas. But Sabas had been dead for a dozen years (531) and the Origenists were regaining the upper hand. Their adversaries had the idea of taking advantage of Pelagius' influence with the emperor and thereby obtaining a fair ruling against their impotent theories. This recourse was quite natural. The Roman Church, at the time of Pope Anastasius I,[31] had forbidden the reading of Origen's writings. In the East, it could be considered

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[29] Procopius, who discusses this matter in his *Hist. arcana*, 27, relates that Paul later sought, by offering a large sum of money to the emperor, to have himself reinstated in his seat; but that Vigilius, then present in Constantinople, resolutely and successfully opposed this.
[30] Life of Saint Sabas by Cyril of Scythopolis, in Cotelier, *Monum. eccl. Græcæ*, vol. III.
[31] Jaffé, 276, 281, 282, 284. Anastasius' letter to Venerius of Milan (Jaffé 281) is marked lost in the new edition of the *Regesta*. It has however been mentioned in the *Bibliophile belge*, 1871, p. 128, based on a Brussels manuscript.

as supporting the campaign undertaken against him by Saint Jerome and Theophilus of Alexandria.

Pelagius accepted these complaints and promised to pursue the accusation that Blessed Sabas had begun in Constantinople against Origenist doctrines. By taking this position, he was well aware that he would make himself disagreeable to certain bishops chosen in previous years from the ranks of the Origenist monks, notably Domitian of Ancyra and Theodore Askidas, Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia. Such a prospect was unlikely to stop him, for the prelates in question, or at least one of them, Askidas, were rivals for influence: Askidas was highly regarded at court.

As soon as he returned to Constantinople, the apocrisiarius spoke about this matter to Patriarch Menas, and the two agreed to draw the prince's attention to the monastic quarrels in Palestine. The anti-Origenists had taken the trouble to extract excerpts from Origen, in the most unfortunate places. They were given to Justinian, who, a great expert in theology, had no trouble discovering monstrous heresies and, above all, an excellent pretext for dogmatization. In short, an imperial edict soon appeared, addressed to Patriarch Menas; this document, enriched with theological dissertations and texts from the Fathers, concluded with a list of anathemas condemning the main points of Origenist doctrine. Justinian once again took on the role of Doctor of the Church, a role to which his taste often led him, even when his duty as a prince did not compel him to become involved in religious quarrels.

Menas assembled a synod. The sentence was regularized by granting it ecclesiastical patronage and a wording consistent with conciliar customs. It was then sent to the other Eastern patriarchs and Pope Vigilius; all affixed their signatures.

Thus, a completely official condemnation was brought against the doctrines of the illustrious Alexandrian, clothed with the civil sanctions appropriate to such an act. If we ignore the circumstances

that gave him the opportunity, if we abandon ourselves to the current of our modern ideas, we are tempted to find this emperor and these prelates very harsh, who do not hesitate to tarnish the memory of a great man for a few doctrinal deviations that his humble docility would certainly have repudiated if there had been someone to point them out to him during his lifetime. But let us leave aside these recriminations, which could only be sustained or dismissed with the aid of considerations foreign to the history at hand and, for the most part, to the way of thinking of people in the sixth century. What they saw most clearly in the condemnation of Origen was that one could exhume the errors contained in the old books, bring before doctrinal authorities, assertions that their authors could no longer retract or explain, and, for some theological *slip*, anathema could fall on memories surrounded by veneration. In the midst of the fire that Theodore Askidas lit to avenge Origen, in the depths of the prison where he wrote to defend Theodore, Ibas, and Theodoret, at the hour when his hand must have signed, trembling, the condemnation of the three chapters, Pelagius doubtless regretted his campaign against the doctor of Alexandria; he must have said to himself that it would perhaps have been good to leave the dead in peace in their tombs, in that sacred silence where their memory could not be compromised by the agitation of unwary admirers.

Askidas had signed like the others. In those days, one signed what had to be signed, even if it meant taking revenge later. The bishop of Caesarea was not a theologian for nothing: he soon found a way to pay back Pelagius in the currency of his own coin.[32]

[32] TL note: Duchesne uses the phrase 'la monnaie de son argent' which translates to "the currency of one's money" in English. It typically refers to receiving what one deserves or getting a fair return for one's investment or efforts. It can imply that one should receive equivalent value for what they have given. It is used similarly in St. Ignatius' Epistle to the Ephesians "be gentle instead of wanting to pay them back in their own coin".

The Roman Church, by associating itself with this new condemnation of Origen, did not have to back down. It had never defended this compromising doctor; on the contrary, it had condemned his writings and even his person to some extent, but during his lifetime, at the time of his disputes with Bishop Demetrius of Alexandria. But there were in a less distant past, in a past to which contemporary religious quarrels were linked, three figures who were very poorly regarded in the East, and who, directly or indirectly, had found themselves covered by Roman patronage. These were the great men of the Nestorian sect, the favorite authors of those suspected of being more or less attached to it: Theodore of Mopsuestia, who died, it is true, before the Council of Ephesus and the outrage caused by Nestorius at Constantinople; Theodoret, the heretic's friend and longtime defender, at least on the grounds of personal interests; Ibas, the much-contested Bishop of Edessa, long-time head of the Nestorian school in that city, the school of which Theodore was the Origen. Ibas and Theodoret had, it is true, condemned Nestorius at the Council of Chalcedon, and Theodore had been excused by death from making a solemn pronouncement on this personal question. But were not their relationships and, above all, their writings known to everyone? If need be, was not the noise the Nestorians had made around them enough to compromise them? Already, in a conference with orthodox bishops in 533, the most learned and moderate Monophysites, led by Severus, had declared that, among their grievances against the Council of Chalcedon, one of the main ones was the reinstatement of Ibas and Theodoret, deposed by the Synod of Dioscorus at Ephesus in 449. Their horror of Theodore was well known, blacker in their eyes than the beast of the Apocalypse. Couldn't the emperor, who was so keen to bring back the Monophysites, sacrifice these three highly compromised figures, especially since he had just denounced Origen for a religious interest that was certainly much less important? If he could, wouldn't the good of the Church and the

security of the empire make it his duty to resort to such a simple means and put an end to endless quarrels at little cost? Ibas, it is true, and Theodoret had been reinstated to their episcopal sees by the Council of Chalcedon; but there was no question of going back on this sentence, inspired by a perhaps exaggerated sense of tolerance. The removal of Ibas and Theodoret from the episcopal lists of Edessa and Cyr would not be decreed; it would be limited to condemning a few of their writings, those whose terms are obviously too favorable to the Nestorian heretics or too harsh against the defenders of orthodoxy, Saint Cyril in particular. As for Theodore of Mopsuestia, if no sentence had yet reached him, no sentence protected him either; the man and his writings could be put on trial. Besides, it was not certain that he was intact; Cyril of Alexandria and many other orthodox authors had openly attacked him; the holy Patriarch Proclus of Constantinople had condemned him. In short, passing a strong sentence against certain writings of Theodoret and Theodoret, against Theodore and his works, was not contrary to the tradition of the Church, but rather to solemnly highlight it on a point where it was opportune to clarify it.

Askidas was a prelate who rarely resided. He was rarely found in Caesarea. In Constantinople, however, he was constantly seen. These arguments, through his mouth or those of his friends, found their way to imperial ears. Justinian, happy as a prince to appease the Monophysite quarrel, or at least to experiment with a means that seemed likely to end the opposition, did not need, as a theologian, to be urged for long to open a new controversy. Theodora, whose undertakings in favor of the Monophysites had so often been thwarted, also welcomed, for want of anything better, the conciliation project.

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The matter, thus initiated, was bound to succeed. The procedure followed for the condemnation of Origen was a fitting example. All that was needed was to follow it. Learned theologians found the texts that needed to be brought to the emperor's attention and prepared the arguments that would justify the sentence and its timeliness. An edict was soon ready to appear: it did, and all that remained was to gather the episcopal signatures. This is where the difficulties began. They would even have begun, one might believe, earlier if Pelagius had been in Constantinople. But Pelagius was no longer there. He had just been recalled to Rome, and the nunciature was managed by another deacon, Stephen, a respectable and firm old man, who knew how to protest once the blow had been struck, but lacked the skill necessary to forestall it.

Pelagius found himself in Rome in a theater more worthy of his proud and intrepid soul than the conventicles of Byzantine theologians and the antechambers of the imperial palace. As a deacon, and doubtless by virtue of a special commission, he had taken charge of the Roman church. Closely hemmed in by Totila's army, cut off from Italy and even from the mouth of the Tiber, awaiting daily relief that never arrived, the city of Rome was prey to the horrors of the most terrible famine. The Byzantine garrison, under the command of the avaricious and ferocious Bessas, stood guard on the ramparts without daring to attempt the slightest attempt to break the blockade. As for the civilian population, they waited, starving, for the moment when their Greek masters would be forced to capitulate, that is, to abandon them to pillage and massacre. Procopius has left us a picture of that terrible year (546)

whose details are chilling. The hope of these desperate people, the only man who remained standing in the midst of this immense misfortune, was the deacon Pelagius. He had brought back from Constantinople a considerable fortune, which, combined with his family patrimony, made him one of the richest men in the city. Everything was devoted to relieving the besieged unfortunates. While there was still hope of negotiating with Totila, it was Pelagius who, as a new Leo, took it upon himself to face the wrath of the barbarian king. He confronted him in vain, but not without commanding the respect of the King of the Goths for his character and courage.

On December 17, 546, the city was taken by treachery. Soldiers from the garrison opened the same Asinaria Gate to the besiegers, which Silverius had accused during the other siege of wanting to surrender. Awoken by the victors' fanfares, the unfortunate Romans believed their last hour had arrived. Through the night, they rushed to the churches and crowded together, bewildered. A large number had crossed Hadrian's Bridge and taken refuge in St. Peter's, the most venerated asylum. When day came, Totila also went there to pay his respects at the apostle's tomb. Pelagius was waiting for him at the threshold of the basilica, holding the Gospels and asking forgiveness for the Romans.

Pardon was granted. With a few exceptions, lives were spared. But the victor made the Romans feel the humiliation they had suffered. After reviewing his comrades-in-arms in the Forum, Theodoric's successor entered the Senate, which undoubtedly held its last session that day under this unexpected presidency. The terrified patricians endured Totila's bloody reproaches for their ingratitude to the Goths, their friends and defenders. In the silence of shame and helplessness, a single voice rose to respond to the victor. It was once again the voice of the Deacon Pelagius, reduced to asking forgiveness for the Senate after having obtained it for the people.

Sad ministry, gloomy duties, but which only those know how to fulfill, in hours of mourning, who have found in the trials of their country the opportunity to show a lofty, strong and generous soul, and to conquer in the eyes of their fellow citizens that moral primacy which survives all others and rallies the desperate.[33]

III

THE FIRST CONDEMNATION OF THE THREE CHAPTERS

While old Rome was sinking into these catastrophes, new Rome was putting old books on trial. The plot hatched by Askidas continued its course. At first, the patriarchs who were asked to sign the condemnation of the three chapters were seized with scruples. In themselves, there could be something reprehensible in the writings in question; those of Theodore especially were difficult to reconcile with the decisions of Ephesus and Chalcedon. But what was the point of going down this path? Origen had just been condemned; today Theodore was being attacked; tomorrow, wouldn't some other Father be attacked? Had Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, Hilary, Cyril of Alexandria himself, not to mention the older authors, written nothing that could give rise to criticism? Should we, from edict to edict, anathematize all the Fathers of the Church? Besides, what reason would there be to touch them? Hadn't Theodoret, sifted through the sieve in the

[33] I cannot speak of the capture of Rome in 546 without evoking another noble image, that of Rusticiana, daughter of Symmachus and widow of Boethius. In the early days of the Byzantine occupation, the proud patrician had hastened to avenge her injuries by having the statues of Theodoric torn down. During the siege, she gave all her possessions to the poor. So, when the city fell to Totila and was plundered, when the senators were reduced to begging for their bread, this noble woman was the only one among that accustomed aristocracy who could extend her hand without shame. The Goths wanted to kill her, to punish her for having torn down the statues of their great king. But Totila, with his usual nobility, prevented this attempt.

proceedings at Chalcedon, been declared unharmed? Ibas' letter, which now scandalized them, had not seemed impious to the Fathers of Chalcedon, who, after having read it, had declared Ibas orthodox.[34] As for Theodore, although reservations could be made about some of his books which had perhaps been interpolated by heretics, his praise had resounded several times in Chalcedon without raising any protest. Basically, what was the intention with the new anathemas? To condemn what the Council of Chalcedon had, if not approved, at least tolerated? Why this anti-Chalcedonian manifestation, at a time when the Church had such a great interest in defending the famous council? It had just been imposed with great fanfare and not without resistance on the churches that did not want it: was it now going to be abandoned? Who, after all, had originally thought of this condemnation? The Acephali, who made no secret of applauding it, unless they found it insufficient, as long as the council was not expressly included. No doubt the emperor was orthodox and Theodore Askidas presented himself as such. But what could we believe of the true thoughts of a man like Askidas, a notorious Origenist, who had just condemned Origen so as not to lose his seat? Obviously Askidas was acephalian *in petto*, and an acephalian person all the more to be feared because he hid his game.

This was what was initially thought in the bishoprics of Constantinople, Antioch, Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Carthage. They even went so far as to say what they thought out loud. But the emperor's orders were precise, and, with threats following them shortly after, the scruples that had ventured onto lips quickly rose

[34] *Relecta ejus epistola, agnovimus eum esse orthodoxum*, say the papal legates at the Council of Chalcedon (Hardouin, vol. II, p. 559), speaking of Ibas's letter. — "If anyone does not anathematize this letter and its supporters, and those who claim that it is orthodox in whole or in part, or who write to defend it and the impieties it contains..., let him himself be anathema," says the Fifth Council, Canon XIV. It will be agreed that a certain amount of attention is required to grasp the agreement between these two decrees, and those who did not perceive it at first glance will be excused.

to the depths of conscience. The four Greek patriarchs complied one after the other.[35]

In Constantinople, Menas took a long time to obtain. Encouraged by the Roman apocrisiarius, he protested that the signature he was being asked for was a renunciation of the Council of Chalcedon. He yet gave in, but on the express and sworn condition that he could withdraw his signature if the Bishop of Rome refused his. Once committed, he was able to force the prelates of his obedience to do the same; but several of them submitted to the nuncio a formal protest against the violence to which they were subjected.

It should be noted, moreover, that the signings were almost everywhere conditional. The emperor's employees expressly declared that the Roman Church would be consulted, which apparently meant that Pope Vigilius would be asked for direct and personal intervention, for, as far as the Roman apocrisiaries could represent their church in the East, the matter was decided in advance. Pelagius' sentiments were well known; his successor, Stephen, had spoken out no less clearly. Moreover, in order to clearly emphasize his position and that of the Holy See, Stephen publicly separated himself from the communion of the Patriarch of Constantinople and the signatory prelates. As for the Pope, he was not yet personally involved; But one could foresee what would happen if he remained in Rome, under the influence of Pelagius, surrounded by a local clergy and an episcopate very distrustful of Greek theologians, very suspicious when he saw them hovering around the work of Saint Leo and the Council of Chalcedon. The best thing to do was obviously to draw him from his Roman environment and bring him to Constantinople.

Vigilius, as we have seen, must have found himself rather uncomfortable in his episcopal city. One might think that he was not too upset to leave; but circumstances were not such that he would have been pleased to make the trip to Constantinople. He therefore

[35] Facundus, *Def.* IV, 4 ; adv. *Mocianum*, p. 861 (Migne).

allowed himself to be taken from Rome; but, once he arrived in Syracuse, he settled there, and, under various pretexts unknown to us, he remained there for about ten months, studying the situation and giving himself time to reflect. The first thing to do was to ascertain the authority of the Western prelates, at least those whose churches were on imperial soil, for, as for those in Gaul and Spain, there was no fear that they would be made to sign dogmatic manifestos at Justinian's pleasure. The Bishop of Milan, Dacius, the most important ecclesiastical figure in Italy after the Pope, had been in Constantinople since 509, driven from his episcopal city by the vicissitudes of war. He came to Syracuse and informed Vigilius of how things were going in the capital. Like the apocrisarian Stephen, Dacius had refused communion from Patriarch Ienas. This encouraged the Pope to resist. Others came to him from the clergy of Sardinia and the Church of Africa.

The emperor's edict had been sent to Carthage as elsewhere. The Africans were in no hurry to comply. The war, which flared up from time to time in this unfortunate country, annexed to the empire for only a few years, did not allow for the convening of the great national council in which the African church was accustomed to deciding on important questions. The Bishop of Carthage undoubtedly made a dilatory reply, which was lost. Another bishop, Pontianus, wrote a letter to the emperor, which we still have:[36] he approves of Justinian's conforming his faith to the teaching of the apostolic see: this, he says, is how one manages not to go astray; but he condemns the idea of condemning the dead, and he expresses the fear that this condemnation would benefit the Eutychian heretics. This letter already gives us an idea of what people in Africa were thinking. The imperial edict was rejected, and to do so, people were happy to side with the Pope.

Around the same time, Pelagius, whom the miseries of the siege did not prevent from thinking about ecclesiastical affairs, wrote, in

[36] Hardouin, *Conc.* vol. III. p. 1.

his own name and that of his colleague Anatole, to a person whom all of Africa held in well-deserved regard, the deacon of Carthage, Ferrandus. Ferrandus was a holy man and a consummate theologian; he had, in particular, meditated extensively on the problem of the Incarnation, so often discussed for two centuries. He was consulted on all sides, as the oracle of science and tradition. Pelagius, of course, had made up his mind, and Ferrandus' arguments were known to him in advance. But it was clever to obtain from such a man a public and reasoned declaration; Ferrandus did not need much persuasion. We still have his response,[37] imbued with the same sentiments as Pontianus'. In addition to these declarations from Africa, it is necessary to point out those made and repeated orally and in writing, in Constantinople itself, by several African prelates whom their business, or perhaps a mission from the Bishop of Carthage, had brought to the court. Vigilius was, in short, very sure of having behind him the entire episcopate of Italy, Sardinia, and Africa. The prelates of Achaia and Illyricum, who were still, at least legally, in obedience to the Pope, for the most part manifested the same dispositions.[38] So that nothing was lacking, the Patriarch of Alexandria. Zoilus, a man who must have known very well what to expect from the Monophysites and how to win them over, wrote to him in Syracuse to inform him that, in his opinion, the edict was completely inappropriate and that he had only signed it under duress.[39]

Reassured by all these demonstrations, Vigilius flattered himself that he could effectively resist the current that had swept away the Eastern episcopate. Justinian, however, urged him daily to continue

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[37] Ep. VI Migne, *P. L.*, vol. LXVII, p. 921.

[38] Non tacuit (Vigilius, quod... venientem Africa etiam et Sardinia, quanquam non per eas transient, per ipsius tamen consiliarium publica eum contestatione pulsaverint, sicut Hellas et Illyricus piorinciæ, per quas venit, ut nullatenus novitati quæ facta est acquiescat (Facundus, *Def.* IV, 3).

[39] Facundus. *Def.* IV, 4.

his journey: he yielded and, at the beginning of autumn, he passed through Patras, from where he continued his journey by land,[40] taking short trips and staying in the principal cities. He stopped in particular at Thessalonica. It was from there, no doubt, that he wrote a letter to Menas in which his attitude was clearly outlined. Menas, informed of the Pope's sentiments, was not without anxiety to see him arrive at Constantinople. He remembered the story of Anthime, whom the favor of Theodora and her husband had not protected against the sentences of Agapitus. A similar disgrace could befall him; For who knew if Vigilius, an insinuating and cunning man, would not succeed in turning the emperor around and diverting the storm onto his ecclesiastical advisers? So, he arranged for the emperor to write in advance to the pope to recommend peace. But this recommendation came at a bad time. Strengthened by the heartfelt support of the Western episcopate, encouraged by the expressions of respect that had not failed to be lavished on him along the way, Vigilius was not in a mood for mercy. He wrote directly to the patriarch himself, declaring that he would be treated by the present pope as he had been by his apocrisiarius and the bishop of Milan, unless he reversed his adherence to the edict. At the same time, he dispatched several envoys to the emperor, begging him, with the greatest importance, to withdraw this unfortunate document.

Justinian let Vigilius' envoys speak, flattering himself that he would get the better of their master when he held him under the spell of his caresses and, if necessary, under the pressure of his authority. A magnificent reception was prepared for the pope. On January 25, 547, the emperor, surrounded by a brilliant retinue, went to meet him. It had been ten years since they had seen each other. The moment was solemn, for Justinian had no doubt just learned of the surrender of old Rome, and it was sad news to announce to his

[40] He was in Patras on October 14, the day he celebrated the consecration of the Bishop of Ravenna, Maximian (Agnellus, *Lib. pontif. Ravenn.*, in Waitz, SS. *Langob.*, p. 326).

pastor. They fell into each other's arms, weeping. Then the priests' chants rose; the two majesties were led to Hagia Sophia, amidst the pomp of Greek processions. Vigilius then took up residence in the Palace of Placidia, the official residence of the Roman nuncios.[41]

There was already a kind of tradition in Constantinople regarding the honors to be paid to the Pope. John I had come there in 525; Agapitus in 536, both sent as ambassadors by the Gothic kings. But it was not to these extraordinary functions, but to their character as successors of Saint Peter that the eager and respectful welcome they received was directed. At that time, despite certain intervals of schism, despite certain conflicts of jurisdiction, the Roman Church was still considered in the East as the principal, sovereign church, the center and focus of Christian unity. The Pope was the head of the Church, the highest religious authority, the only one whose decrees could definitively decide a controversy of faith or discipline. The prestige of his high office was further enhanced by the majesty of ancient Rome and its great apostolic sanctuaries; even the distance added something to it. Thus, the ancient popes had refrained from leaving this imposing theater. They had never been seen attending ecumenical councils. If a few of them, in the sixth century and later, presented themselves at court, it was never of their own free will. In this they were quite right. For, if their religious predominance was marked enough to counterbalance and dominate the authority of the Eastern patriarchs, their position was less strong in the face of the head of the empire. Especially since the latter had boldly taken a hand, not only in mixed questions but also in quarrels over pure dogma, conflicts could break out at any moment, and conflicts from which one was not sure to emerge without losing something of one's consideration. Vigilius was soon to experience this the hard way.

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[41] *Lib. pont.* n. 105; cf. the chronicles of Marcellinus and Darius of Avenches, in the year 547.

For the time being, the court refrained from opposing him in any way, except, of course, regarding the withdrawal of the edict. As for the rest, they let him do as he pleased and cast his fire. Menas persisted in maintaining his signature, despite the promise he had made to the nuncio to withdraw it if the pope demanded it. He was excommunicated, along with his adherents.[42] Menas, it is said,[43] retaliated and had the pope's name erased from his liturgical diptychs.

The quarrel was short-lived. By June 29, if Theophanes is to be believed, the pope and the patriarch were reconciled. What is certain is that Justinian handled it so well that after a few months, Vigilius was no longer so sure he was right. The court theologians showed him that Theodore of Mopsuestia was more dangerous than he had imagined. They translated for him excerpts from his works, skillfully chosen; they asked him if he approved of all the statements of Theodoret and Ibas. Vigilius, who, no doubt, had not until then had the leisure to study the question so closely, was greatly scandalized. He began to understand that the Orientals, for whom Theodore's Greek works were not closed books as they were for the Latins, were perhaps excusable for having been moved, or rather for having approved, of the prince's emotion.

But what to do? Hadn't the Council of Chalcedon brushed all this aside, and wasn't it undermining its authority to denounce people it had either praised or solemnly reinstated in their positions? He was given to understand that there was a way to reconcile the two

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[42] According to Saint Gregory, Theodora was also excommunicated (Ep. II, 51), along with the Acephalians. This must be understood with some reservations. It is difficult for Vigilius to be excommunicated to the point of a special and nominal excommunication. Moreover, Vigilius did not have to excommunicate the Acephalians who were already excommunicated and who did not directly implicate him.

[43] What is said here about Menas is supported only by the much later testimony of the chronicler Theophanes. Facundus (*Adv. Moc*, p. 862 Migne) speaks only of a general excommunication: "Illos qui talibus (the signatory prelates) communicaverant veniens in regiam civitatem a communione suspendit."

things, to condemn the three chapters without affecting the council.

In the pope's Latin entourage, there were hardly any but mediocrities. The Bishop of Milan himself, Dacius, does not appear to have shown any more intelligence in all this than Vigilius. Only a young African prelate, Facundus, Bishop of Hermiana in Byzacena, was aware of all the details of the problem. He knew Greek and could fluently read the incriminated books, along with everything published on them. But his somewhat restless ardor was not calculated to accredit him with the pope. It was not Facundus' eyes that could discern the ways of conciliation. For him, anyone who dwelt on Ibas or Theodore was an acephalian; to touch the three chapters was to desecrate the holy ark of the Council of Chalcedon. It was worth returning to Eutyches and Dioscorus. Besides a few suburban prelates, Vigilius had with him four Roman deacons, his nephew Rusticus, Sebastian, Peter, and Sarpatus, his first notary, Surgentius, and several subdeacons. All these people were more suited to handling ordinary ecclesiastical matters than to giving good advice on a special and delicate matter. Rusticus and Sebastian were, moreover, disreputable people. The former, a great reader, assiduously leafed through works which, although having nothing in common with the theology of Mopsuestia, were no more edifying for that. Romantic stories were even circulated about him, calculated to compromise his dignity. As for Sebastian, charged with administering the assets of the Roman Church in Dalmatia and Praevalitania, he modeled himself on the unfaithful steward, filling his pockets, turning a blind eye to abuses; and, instead of remaining at his post, he found himself constantly involved in the intrigues of Constantinople.

With such advisors, Vigilius must have been easy enough to persuade.[44] Pelagius would have been the one needed at his side. But

[44] We must also not lose sight of the fact that Vigilius has always been accused of loving money.

Pelagius could not be everywhere. For a moment, in the first months of the year, he had been seen at Constantinople. After the capture of Rome, Totila had sent him to Justinian, accompanied by another ambassador, to ask him to consent to peace. The emperor received this legation with haughty majesty and limited himself, in reply, to saying that, since Belisarius had his powers in Italy, it was to him that the king of the Goths should address himself. Totila, enraged, took an extraordinary step. The entire population of Rome, led by the senators, was taken captive to Campania. It was not an innumerable multitude that thus took the road to exile; War, sieges, emigration, had reduced to a handful of men what was once the sovereign people of the world. But what solitude within the walls of the great metropolis! What horror must not have inspired in the timid passerby who ventured to enter them for a moment, these deserted streets, these silent squares, these closed basilicas, these empty dwellings where wild beasts were beginning to take the place of men!

For forty days, an unheard-of event that has not been seen in any other law in its long history, life in Rome was brought to a standstill. Then Belisarius, who, entrenched in Porto, was watching for a favorable opportunity, suddenly returned there with a small force and managed to hold his own there for two years. The emigrants returned little by little, but not all. Part of the aristocracy had fled to Constantinople. Those patricians who had remained in the hands of Totila had been settled in Capua where they lived miserably. One day, while the king was waging war in Umbria, John the Bloodthirsty, one of Belisarius' lieutenants, suddenly made a beeline for Campania, removed these remnants of the Roman aristocracy, and sent them to Sicily. What had become of the Roman clergy is unknown. They must have dispersed, following their flocks, on the roads of exile. Some priests undoubtedly returned early. As for Pelagius, he seems to have joined the main group of the lay aristocracy, for the following year, in 548, we find him in Sicily.

In Constantinople, he had been able to spend a few moments with the Pope, but very brief moments, for Totila was in a hurry to see his ambassadors again. It is certain at least that he had been away from court for several months when Vigilius began to show signs of weakness.

The Pope, in fact, closely and relentlessly pressed, gave in to obsession, and ended up believing that the three chapters could be condemned without harming the Council of Chalcedon. He flattered himself that he had arranged things so well that not only would he have no reproach to make, but that his decision would be accepted in the West. In this, which was the difficult point, he was strangely deluding himself, as the sequel soon showed him.

Justinian, seeing him in such a good mood, urged him to finally put his name at the bottom of the imperial edict. Here Vigilius resisted energetically. The Eastern episcopate could be so weak as to allow the emperor to dogmatize and limit itself to ratifying the sentences he passed on matters of faith; the apostolic see could not lend itself to such an abdication. If they wanted them to pronounce, they had to let them act themselves, in their own name, deferring to them, if not the emperor's edict with the episcopal adhesions, at least the documents on which the dispute rested, that is, the writings of Theodore, Ibas, and Theodoret. Thus, the pope would be what he should be, the supreme judge of dogmatic controversies; he would not appear to be yielding to the imperial power the slightest shred of his traditional authority.

It was in vain that Justinian sought to shake him in this situation. The pope maintained his position with inflexible tenacity. They tried in vain to frighten him, accuse him of heresy, claim that he patronized heretics. Nothing worked. They went further: threats were made against him; he may have feared that acts of violence would be resorted to; but his energy proved itself above vain terrors, and he was heard one day to cry out in a solemn meeting: "I protest

that if you hold me captive, you have not, for that reason, chained the apostle Peter."[45]

Forced to give in on this question, which was not purely a matter of form, Justinian wanted at least to be assured that the judgment he would allow to be rendered would not contradict his own authority. Vigilius gave him all the guarantees he wanted on this point. A certificate, bearing his signature, was given to each of the two Augusti: in it, he pronounced anathema to the three chapters, in his name and in the name of the Roman Church.[46]

This was tying their hands in advance, but the public could know nothing about it. Vigilius would have the outward glory of submitting, once again, to the tribunal of the apostolic see, a cause already judged by the patriarchs of the East and the emperor himself. He would have the merit of restoring peace to the Church, of reconciling East and West, and no doubt also of securing the submission of the acephali dissidents, and all this without allowing the supreme authority exercised a century earlier by his predecessor Leo to be lowered into his hands. With his eye fixed on these brilliant prospects, he hastened the preparations for the judgment.

We no longer have the minutes of this assize. It was not a council. Vigilius sat as judge, under conditions analogous to those in which he would have dealt with this matter had he been in Rome. A few bishops served as his assessors. They were chosen mainly from among those who opposed the edict or who, yielding to their scruples, had not yet signed. Two sessions had already been spent examining the incriminated books, when Facundus, the learned bishop of Hermiana, who was well versed in the matter, was given

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[45] *Ep. cleric. Italiæ*, Migne, P. L., vol. LXIX, p. 115.

[46] These two schedules are preserved in the acts of the Fifth Ecumenical Council (Hardouin, vol. III, p. 175), seventh session. They were later interpolated, in one place at least, to introduce a monothelite expression; but, in substance, they appear authentic. See on this Hefele, *Hist. des Conciles*, vol. III, p. 469 et suiv.

the floor, for he had just expounded it, with great detail, in a treatise in twelve books. Neglecting for the moment the question of whether the incriminated texts should be blamed or praised, Facundus resolutely shifted the debate to another level and asked the judges if they did not believe that the proposed condemnation compromised the authority of the Council of Chalcedon. Vigilius saw the dismay on the prelates' faces: the blow had been well struck. Facundus, pressing his advantage, was about to demonstrate that once the condemnation was pronounced, Chalcedon was finished. But the president interrupted him, declared the matter heard, and, instead of proceeding to a vote, asked each of the bishops present to give him their opinion, at their leisure and in writing. This time limit having been granted, the prelates worked on the matter individually. Vigilius saw them arrive one by one, held in custody, holding their certificates, worded, of course, in accordance with the sentence the Pope had promised to issue.

The Acephali laughed secretly at all this; Askidas, Menas, and the entire retinue of signatory bishops applauded openly. Joy on this side reached its peak when, a few days later, on Easter Eve (548), the Pope's *Judicatum*, addressed to Patriarch Menas, was published, condemning the three chapters, that is, the person and writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia, the letter of Ibas to Maris, the writings of Theodoret against the faith and against the twelve anathemas of Saint Cyril. Very strong reservations, it is true, regarding the authority of the Council of Chalcedon were attached to this decree; they were even so clear and precise that no Monophysite could have signed them without thereby making a complete abjuration. So, none of them made any sign of rallying to orthodoxy. Askidas and Justinian had, in short, made a hollow bush,[47] after having greatly troubled the Church and greatly tormented the unfortunate pope. It is true that Pelagius must have been horribly offended.

[47] TL note: 'fait buisson creux' It can describe people or situations that appear impressive or significant but do not have much depth or substance.

IV

VIGILIUS ON THE PATH TO PAIN

This last result, despite the importance the Origenists might have attached to it, perhaps did not justify such a deployment of forces. Moreover, it was not entirely certain. Pelagius was not alone in his opinion in the West, nor even in Constantinople. The eloquent Facundus, ordered to comply, protested and offered to defend the cause of the three chapters in writing. His great work, unfortunately, was not finished: and, as he had only seven days to write his apology, instead of putting the finishing touches to it, he decided to make an extract, which he offered to the emperor, uselessly, as one might well imagine, for Justinian was too great a theologian to condescend to listen to the reasons of his adversaries. The sentence having been passed, Facundus and some friends excommunicated themselves and abstained from all contact with the Pope and the Patriarch. Shortly after, the Bishop of Hermiana published his great treatise, completed with more leisure. But this opposition aroused the anger of the court; Facundus, to escape unpleasant treatment, was forced into hiding.

The opposition of a few people in Constantinople had been easily overcome, but what would be said in the West?

First of all, it was necessary to warn Pelagius and explain things clearly to him. This was the first thing that was done within the Pope's entourage. Thus, the *Judicatum* had barely been promulgated in Constantinople when two copies reached him.[48] History does not record what he said about it: from that moment until 551, we completely lose track of him. But we can conjecture what he thought of it, and it is not unreasonable to suspect that his hand may

[48] *Ep. Vigilii ad Rusticum et Sebastianum* (Migne, *P. L.*, vol. LXIX, p, 45).

have had a little part in stirring up the storm that immediately formed around Vigilius.

Italy, prey to the horrors of war, deprived by death, exile, or absence of most of its bishops, appears to have offered only passive resistance. In Gaul, the rumor spread that the Pope had abandoned Saint Leo and the Council of Chalcedon. Aurelian, Bishop of Arles, who was being consulted on all sides, as the vicar of the Holy See, showed great concern and decided to send to Constantinople to find out exactly what was going on. In Dalmatia and Illyricum, there was much more excitement. Benenatus, Bishop of the new city of *Justiniana prima* and the Pope's vicar in these regions, having gathered in synod the prelates of his obedience to make them adhere to the *Judicatum*, was himself excommunicated by them. As for the bishops of Africa, they met in a general council, protested against the condemnation of the three chapters, and separated Vigilius from their communion until he relented. Even before this sentence was handed down, fanatical monks traveled to Constantinople to stir up a scandal in favor of the supposedly threatened faith. The opposition reached Alexandria, where Patriarch Zoilius refused to accept the *Judicatum* and withdrew the signature he had initially given. The Patriarch of Jerusalem did the same.

Even in the pope's immediate entourage, defections were occurring. His deacons Sebastian and Rusticus, the latter his own nephew, and a whole group of subdeacons, notaries, and defenders, now declared that the *Judicatum* was contrary to the tradition and honor of the Roman Church, regretted the praise with which they had received it, and sowed exaggerated and pernicious interpretations everywhere. Reprimanded several times, they continued their intrigues. Finally, at Christmas 549, after having themselves urged the pope to officiate solemnly, as the emperor had requested, they abandoned him at the time of the ceremony.

Angered by this affront, Vigilius deposed them from their functions by public decree.[49]

It was becoming clear that the so-called pacification had achieved nothing at all, that instead of bringing back the Acephali, it had offended the Catholics and thrown illustrious churches into the path of schism. It was a fine result.

Increasingly disgusted, Vigilius persuaded the emperor that nothing would be done until the Western prelates had a more accurate understanding of the matter. Just as he had changed his mind upon seeing the state of affairs in Constantinople, so too one could hope that the bishops of Africa, Illyria, and other Latin countries would be convinced, if they were better informed, that it was necessary to condemn the three chapters and possible to do so while respecting the decrees of Chalcedon. It was therefore necessary to withdraw the *Judicatum* and prepare for the convening of an ecumenical council where they would be given broad representation. Justinian allowed himself to be persuaded and returned the original copy of his *Judicatum* to the pope; but as a prudent man who valued his safety, he made him swear on the nails of the Passion and the four Gospels that he would do everything in his power to have the three chapters condemned and would do nothing to the contrary. This oath was taken in the presence of Askidas and the consular Cethegus, a Roman senator who had retired to Constantinople since 546.[50]

While awaiting the council, Justinian set about preparing it. The proposed anathema affected certain writings of Theodoret and Ibas, but not their personalities. On the contrary, it was intended that Theodore of Mopsuestia be condemned in his person and in his writings. Here, many people objected that it was senseless to condemn a bishop who had died in communion with the Church and whose memory had never ceased to be honored in the country

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[49] *Ep. Vigilii ad Rusticum et Sebastianum* (Migne, *P. L.*, vol. LXIX, p, 43-51).
[50] Hardouin, *Conc.*, vol. III, p 184.

where he had lived. To alleviate this qualm, it was resolved to establish, by means of a solemn investigation, that Theodore had never been honored as a saint in his own church and even that his name, struck from the diptychs, was not pronounced among those bishops for whom the church of Mopsuestia offered prayers. To this end, the provincial council of Second Cilicia was convened; imperial officers were appointed, and a meticulous investigation of church books and local tradition was carried out. The result was that, since at least the beginning of the sixth century, Theodore no longer appeared in the Mopsuestia diptychs, and his name had been replaced by that of Cyril of Alexandria. This should not be surprising, since memories and documents only date back to the time of the Henoticon, that is, to a time not very favorable to Theodore.

Not all the preliminaries of the great council were of such a trivial nature. Justinian had a score to settle with the bishops of Africa, whom he considered to have become excessively emancipated, as well as with the patriarchs of Alexandria and Jerusalem, Zoilus and Macarius, who had for some time refused to approve the condemnation. Both patriarchs were deposed and appointed successors. The Bishop of Carthage, Reparatus, Firmus, Primate[51] of Numidia, Primasius and Verecundus,[52] Bishops of Byzacena, were summoned to Constantinople. It was not their intention to attack them directly on the issue in dispute; but the wars and revolts that Africa had recently been the scene of could easily provide a pretext for political trials against those who might be imprudent enough to resist the emperor's wishes. The prelates landed in the imperial city around the middle of 551. It had been barely a year since the

[51] In Africa, where, except in the proconsular province, there were no metropolitan sees, the episcopate of each province obeyed its dean, who bore the title of primate.

[52] Primasius and Verecundus were learned men. Writings by both survive (Migne, P. L., vol. LXVII; Pitra, *Spicil. Solesm.*, vol. IV), but these are unrelated to the question of the three chapters.

Judicatum had been abandoned and preparations were being made for an ecumenical council. But things had already changed.

Askidas, in fact, had no difficulty in persuading Justinian that these manifestations of Western opinion boded nothing good for the future council. If prelates of both languages were admitted in equal proportion, there was a strong fear that the Latins would take control of the pope, or at least succeed in restoring his courage, and that, despite his promises, Vigilius would speak out against the condemnation. Already very resistant in their own right, the Western prelates would be even more difficult once united and united around their leader. Who knows if their example would not produce defections, even within the ranks of the Greek episcopate? Many had signed out of fear or complacency. Were we not, by this route, heading for defeat? And even if success were assured, would it not be better to owe it only to the emperor and the Eastern episcopate?

These ideas germinated in Justinian's mind. He began by allowing draft anathemas against the Three Chapters to be read before him, despite the Pope's demands that strict neutrality be maintained. Askidas threw unsigned writings favorable to his ideas into the public. When the Pope complained, he promised not to do it again, but immediately began again. Little by little, at the increasingly pressing instigation of his favorite bishops, Justinian came to draft in his own name a confession of faith, ending with anathemas, and one fine morning it was learned that a new imperial edict, along the same lines as that of 545, was being posted on the doors of churches.[53]

In the papal world, everyone was more or less aware of what was going on. For some time, relations had been cold, and even quite

[53] On the events of this period see, in the letters of Vigilius, the *Damnatio Theodori* (Jaffé, 930; Migne, *P. L*,. vol. LXIX, p. 59) and the encyclical that, *Universo populo Dei* (Jaffé, 931; Migne, *l. c.*, p. 69); cf. *Epistola clericorum Italiæ*, document given, towards the end of 551, to Frankish ambassadors by clerics from Milan or Aquileia (Migne, l.c, p. 114).

sour, between the Pope and the Emperor. The slightest sense of propriety should have prompted the latter, if not to come to an agreement with the Pope, at least to inform him in advance of what was going to happen. It was perhaps to bring him the official and belated news that the Bishop of Caesarea presented himself, with the clergy of Constantinople, on the very morning of the publication of the edict, at the pontifical residence in the Placidia Palace. He found there a large crowd, Greek and Latin prelates, gathered around Vigilius and the Bishop of Milan. They were very moved. They strongly implored Askidas and the other people present to refrain from any adherence to the edict; they urged them to work with the emperor to ensure that he withdrew and did not prejudge a matter reserved for the council. The pope added that anyone who contravened these recommendations should consider themselves excluded from the communion of the Holy See. Dacius made the same declaration regarding the church of Milan, and testified that, from Spain to the Veneto, the bishops of the West were of the same opinion as he was.

Askidas and his followers paid no heed to the Pope's orders and threats. They went to the very church where the edict was posted and celebrated Mass with great pomp.

Vigilius was pushed to the limit. Pelagius, moreover, had found a way to return to him and supported him with his energy. The Greek prelates, Menas first and foremost, soon realized this, for the Pope's door was now closed to them, and he refrained from setting foot in their churches. He even had a sentence of deposition drawn up against the Archbishop of Caesarea, and of excommunication against the Patriarch of Constantinople and the prelates of his allegiance. This attitude greatly irritated the emperor. A storm soon began to rage around the Palace of Placidia. Soon a rumor spread that it was intended to kidnap the Pope and the Bishop of Milan. Reduced to this extremity, Vigilius and Dacius decided to flee to the church of Saint Peter *in Hormisda* and place themselves under the

protection of the religious asylum. Justinian gave orders to rescue them. The praetor of police commanded an armed troop and marched on the basilica. Then a lamentable scene ensued. Vigilius had just affixed his signature to the sentence already prepared against the instigators of the edict; a trusted person received this document for safekeeping, with the mission of posting it in Constantinople if any misfortune should befall him. Suddenly the door opened: with bows drawn and swords raised, the praetor's soldiers rushed across the nave. The Pope and the Archbishop of Milan pressed against the altar; Around them, the Roman clerics, greatly moved, nevertheless put on a brave face and sought to protect the pontiffs. At the command, the henchmen approached. One by one, the clerics, the Roman deacons, and the Archbishop of Milan were dragged from their sacred refuge. The last to remain, the Pope clung to the columns of the altar. Someone dared to lay hands on the Vicar of Saint Peter; he was seized by the feet and the beard, despite his age. Vigilius, a tall man of great physical strength, resisted the efforts of his attackers. They pulled so hard that the altar gave way; the columns, the holy table, everything collapsed; the Pope would have been crushed if the clerics, rushing forward, had not supported the ruin of the monument. Meanwhile, a large crowd had rushed up. At first, restrained by fear, when they saw the soldiers seize the Pope and the altar collapse on him, they began to cry out in horror and anger. Terrified and disgusted, the praetor's subordinates released their victim and fled with their leader, pursued by the jeers of the multitude.

Thus this miserable and cowardly exploit failed, the only result of which was to attract the sympathy of the population towards the pope. It was important to dislodge him at all costs from a place where people would flock from all sides to venerate living martyrs, to listen to their exhortations and complaints. The pontiffs would not hear of leaving. It was necessary to negotiate with them, to give them guarantees and oaths. They did not get everything they asked

for, because Justinian found a way to quibble over the details; however, they were able to return to the Palace of Placidia.

They did not rest there for long. Every day brought them new setbacks. There was no kind of harassment that was not inflicted on them. Their servants were taken away, replacing them with others, charged with publicly insulting them; they were slandered in Italy, with a view to having them deposed. To this end, they did not hesitate to fabricate forged letters, which were written under their names by notaries bribed with money.

In vain did the Pope send protest after protest to the emperor. No one cared. Soon the Palace of Placidia became a veritable prison, every avenue of which was guarded. They barely took care to conceal it. The Pope's people could see the posts of the disguised spies; he himself, from his room, could hear their voices. Finally, two days before Christmas, taking advantage of a dark winter night, he decided to escape. Risking his life, he crept up a wall under construction, feeling the stones in the darkness, and thus reached a passage free from surveillance. From there, he reached the seashore; a boat was waiting for him and took him to Chalcedon, where he took refuge in the church of Saint Euphemia. His companions, the Archbishop of Milan and several other prelates, soon joined him there.

The asylum was well chosen. The defenders of the Council of Chalcedon were gathered at the very place where the famous assembly had held its sessions just a century earlier. The saint whose protection they invoked was the very one to whom the Council Fathers, deeply divided and despairing of reaching an agreement, had, as it were, entrusted the task of settling their controversies. Thus, the memory of Saint Euphemia and that of the Council had become somewhat intertwined. Above the theological quarrels, the mysterious dogmas, and the terrible sentences, hovered the image of the young martyr. For the common people, Saint Euphemia and the Council of Chalcedon were one and the

same. Since the Council was defeated, churches were being built everywhere under the name of Saint Euphemia, in the West as well as in the East.

The Pope's flight soon became known in Constantinople, where it caused a great stir. From the terraces of the imperial palace, overlooking the Bosphorus, the emperor could see the sacred edifice from which his victims were challenging him. The inhabitants of the great city also saw him, and more than one secretly rejoiced to see the tyrant in such embarrassment. Even for mere idlers, free from theological concerns, it was a spectacle of interest to see these great powers battling. It was well worth the excitement of the circus, the races between the *Blues* and the *Greens*. Justinian, however, was in no mood to let the public enjoy his disappointment for long. He suspected, moreover, that the event was of such magnitude that it could be seen as far away as the West. What would people say in Italy, Illyria, Africa, and Gaul, when they learned that the Pope, the Archbishop of Milan, and the representatives of the Italian and African episcopate, hunted by him even in their homes, had found salvation only at the altars of Saint Euphemia? What grace would it give to anyone to claim that they had no grudge against the Council of Chalcedon, when they were reduced to profaning its sanctuary and tearing away its defenders? Thus, no effort was spared to bring the fugitives back to the Palace of Placidia. Since the councils and unofficial protests had no effect, a solemn embassy was sent to the Pope, composed of the greatest figures in the empire. Belisarius himself led it. With him came several patricians, consulars, and other high dignitaries from the palace or the army. They were charged with giving the Pope every guarantee, offering him all the oaths that would be appropriate. But Vigilius did not allow himself to be taken in by this pompous device, nor by promises whose value he had been able to appreciate for more than five years. He wisely replied that the time for oaths was over, that he was not demanding any, that he wanted action. If the

emperor restored to the Church the peace he had worked so hard to secure for her thirty years earlier, the Pope would then leave Saint Euphemia without asking for more.

The emperor's envoys withdrew. In dismissing them, Vigilius asked them to urge their master to refrain from any dealings with the excommunicated, even though the sentence against them had not yet been publicly announced.

In response to this act of vigor, Justinian sent the Pope a letter full of threats and insults, so insolent that he did not think it necessary to sign it, and the messenger who delivered it did not dare authenticate it with his own signature. This letter was a bad omen. Seeing the hour of violence approaching, Vigilius decided to make a solemn appeal to the entire Catholic Church. He wrote a long encyclical letter, in which he recalled the violence perpetrated against him the previous August, the scenes at Saint Peter *in Hormisda*, his flight to Chalcedon, the embassies, and the attempts to force him out of his asylum. Then came a profession of faith as explicit as possible, notably on his attachment to the Council of Chalcedon, without any mention of the three chapters. This testament, for that's what it was, was addressed to the *universo populo Dei*, in the name of Vigilius, "bishop of the Catholic Church." One could now do with him what one wished. The Christian world would know what to think of the faith and constancy of its spiritual leader.

Just as he was about to sign this document, on Sunday, February 4, a new messenger from the court was announced. He was introduced. The emperor once again renewed his offers of guarantees and oaths. Vigilius, in the calm of a well-formed resolution and a satisfied conscience, insisted that the misfortunes that were about to occur could not be blamed on his obstinacy. He replied that, as for himself, he had nothing to change in the decisions already communicated to the emperor and that he would not leave Chalcedon until he had obtained satisfaction; but that, if

the emperor wished to discuss religious matters, either with the Bishop of Milan or with another person in the pope's entourage, he only had to send two magistrates, whose names were given to him. They would take an oath, and Dacius would follow them, charged with specifying to the sovereign the claims to which he should respond.

The account of this interview was added to the text of the encyclical, and it was definitively signed on February 5, 552. After this date, history becomes somewhat obscure; it is difficult to consolidate with certainty the events whose memory has somehow come down to us. Justinian appears to have proceeded, as was his custom, with a mixture of violence and cunning. He succeeded in separating the pope from his entourage; several of the bishops who accompanied him were seized and held in solitary confinement; his deacons, Tullianus and Pelagius, were forcibly removed from the asylum of Saint Euphemia. Once again, they laid hands on the pope himself.[54] But nothing could shake his resolve, and in the end they backed down from committing a pointless sacrilege. Moreover, there was no way to appoint a successor, as had been done for the bishops of Alexandria, Jerusalem, Carthage, and so many other sees, and in Rome for Silverius himself. Rome, in fact, had returned to the power of Totila since 549, that is to say, it was safe from the intrigues and coups of the Byzantine court. No other pope was possible than the one who clung to the altar of Saint Euphemia and defied everything with unshakeable courage. Strange thing! It was in this moment of extreme peril that Vigilius felt strongest. The

[54] "Ita ut iniquissima præsumptione, sub gravi discrimine, abstraherentur sanctissimi viri Pelagius et Tullianus diacones de basilica beatissimæ martyris Euphemiæ in Chalcedonem, ubi sanctus papa cæsus est et diversorum sacerdotum turba conclusa. Tunc demum [per] diversorum basilicas in civitate regia et in locis celeberrimis proposita est charta damnationis præfati Theodori vel excommunicationis episcoporum diversorum, huic errori consentientium." (Mansi, *Conc*, vol. IX, p. 57.) These words are borrowed from a document, unknown to the ancient collectors of councils, which appears to be a fragment of a collection of pieces sent by the pope in the West, in the first months of 552.

sentences against Askidas, Menas, and their adherents, long since drawn up but always kept in reserve, were promulgated and posted by order of the pope in the most frequented places in the capital. This act of audacity, supported by the sympathy his misfortunes rallied to him, burst forth in the midst of Justinian's embarrassments and terrified the swarm of his favorite prelates.

He himself advised them to give in and find a way to reach an agreement with the Pope.

The result of these arrangements was that the Patriarch of Constantinople, Archbishop of Caesarea, Patriarch of Ephesus, and the other compromised prelates presented to the Pope at Saint Euphemia a declaration full, it is true, of reservations, but quite humble on the whole and likely to give him satisfaction.[55] They protested their veneration for the four councils, in particular that of Chalcedon and the decisions taken there in agreement with the vicars of the Holy See, and accepted all the dogmatic letters of Saint Leo and the other popes. They denied having written anything against the three chapters, since it had been agreed to say nothing about them, but consented to all documents published in this regard being withdrawn and handed over to Vigilius. Likewise, they protested that they had nothing to do with the attacks against him; but they asked his forgiveness, as if they had been the real culprits. Finally, they also asked forgiveness for having admitted to their communion people excommunicated by him.

Vigilius knew his world well enough to judge these repentances according to their true value. However, he considered that the satisfaction was sufficient, and that things had been restored to more or less the same position they had been before his first flight from the Palace of Placidia to the Basilica of Saint Peter *in Hormisda*. He therefore returned to Constantinople. Some time later, in the course of the year of 552, the Archbishop of Milan and Patriarch Menas died.

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[55] Inserted in the *Constitutum* of Vigilius Jaffé, 935; Migne, *P. L.*, t. LXIX, p. 67).

In Italy, the long tragedy of the Gothic War was approaching its conclusion. Narses, having landed at Ravenna with a large army, had succeeded in defeating Totila in the Apennines. The king of the Goths had perished in the action, and the Byzantine general, pushing his successes forward, had just captured Rome. The triumph, this time, seemed definitive: and indeed, from that year on, the city of Rome remained in the power of the empire until, in the middle of the eighth century, it became independent under the government of its pontiffs and the protection of the Franks.

It would have been magnanimous to celebrate this event by restoring peace to the Church and returning to the Romans their spiritual leader, separated from them for seven long years. Those who expected this had not measured the stubbornness of Justinian, the pride of Askidas, and the tenacity of theological grudges. Everything had to be destroyed one last time to defeat the three chapters.

The project of an ecumenical council, put forward two years earlier, then plagued by the latest crises, was once again revived. The new patriarch, Eutychius, made official overtures on this subject in the letter he wrote to the pope on the occasion of his installation on January 6, 553. Vigilius having received them favorably, the emperor sent out the letters of convocation throughout his empire. The pope would have liked the meeting to be held in Italy or Sicily; but he was not listened to, and it was to Constantinople that the prelates were asked to go.

No one came from Gaul or Spain,[56] for political reasons that are easy to understand. In Italy, there were hardly any bishops left: many had perished in the catastrophes of recent years; the distance of the pope and the archbishop of Milan had prevented the vacant sees from being filled; Finally, in the ecclesiastical province of

[56] It was at this time that, taking advantage of the internal dissensions within the Visigothic monarchy, Justinian managed to reestablish the imperial regime in the southeastern part of Spain.

Aquileia, a good number of cities had fallen into the hands of the Franks and found themselves separated from the empire. The bishops of Illyria and Dalmatia, suspecting that their opinions would not have a majority, refused to come, and no effort was made to persuade them. Africa could have provided a respectable number of prelates. But care was taken in their selection and only those were allowed to come whose personal interests they hoped to prevail over, or those who had already spoken out against the three chapters.

This abstention, voluntary or forced, of the almost entire Latin episcopate placed the pope in a strange embarrassment. Several of his advisors, Pelagius in particular, rejected any concession. But Vigilius listened to them half-heartedly. As far as he himself was concerned, he had long ago made up his mind, condemned the three chapters in his *Judicatum* of 548, and guaranteed, by withdrawing it the following year, that he was ready to start again. But that was not the question. What mattered was that the Western clergy follow him in this direction, and, unfortunately, this was something that could hardly be hoped for, since no one could make him understand the need to make concessions. So Vigilius, deeply troubled, would hear no more talk of a council. Since it was necessary to finish the matter, he proposed a conference between himself and three Latin bishops on the one hand and four Greek prelates on the other. This proposal was not rejected directly but amended: each of the five patriarchates was to be represented at the conference by four bishops, the patriarch (or his legate), and three others. Vigilius rejected this arrangement, and they found themselves once again faced with the council, whose members, already in Constantinople, were only asking to meet again. In determining the pope, it was often objected that, after all, the other ecumenical councils had included only Greek-speaking Fathers; the Latin Church had been represented by the papal legates and a few Latin bishops. However,

the pope himself was in Constantinople, with twenty-five Latin bishops; It was a sufficient public deputation.

The objection was all the more insidious because it would have been difficult to answer truthfully. Undoubtedly, there had been few Latin bishops at the Council of Ephesus, but they had the majority, the influence of Saint Cyril, and the moral authority of the Western Empire; at Chalcedon, they had the two emperors on their side, not to mention a very large number of Greek bishops and the wind of reaction stirred up by Dioscorus' attacks. The position taken by the Roman Church, at Nicaea, Ephesus, and Chalcedon, was consistent with the clearly visible attitude of the entire Western Church. Was it the same today? Was the pressure exerted by the emperor in line with the sentiments of the West? And if we were to argue that the West should think like the Pope and that the Pope was in favor of condemnation, wouldn't events show that the Latin Church was not, as much as we believed, in the hands of its leader?

It was difficult to say these things to the Greek prelates, little disposed to be moved by the difficulties of the Apostolic See; it would have been unnecessarily humiliating. From then on, there was only one thing left to do: abandon the council, renounce the condemnation of the three chapters, fall back into the ranks of the Westerners and thus save, at the same time as the honor of the Holy See, the unity and discipline of the Western Church. Pelagius was the man for such energetic advice; he was finally listened to. Vigilius declared that the council could meet and deliberate according to its own inspirations; the pope, without taking part in it himself, would soon make his decision known.

The assembly opened on May 5, 553, in the *secretarium* of Hagia Sophia. The first sessions were spent hearing the reading of a letter from the emperor setting out the state of opinions, the attitude of the parties, and the question in dispute, and then sending summons to the pope and the other Latin bishops present in Constantinople, but not to the council. For his part, Justinian had solemn petitions

made to the pope; processions of patriarchs, patricians, and notaries followed one another through the streets leading from Hagia Sophia and the palace to the pontifical residence of Placidia. All these demonstrations were unsuccessful. The council then began reading the incriminating documents and discussing the reasons and authorities that could be adduced in their favor. With everyone gathered in agreement, this procedure was straightforward and uncomplicated. It was a matter of who would pronounce the strongest anathemas against Theodore, Ibas, and Theodoret, who would raise the most enthusiastic cries in honor of the orthodox emperor, friend of God, Justinian.

May 14, Vigilius announced that his decision was ready and that he wished to inform the emperor of it, through a number of high officials, specifically designated. One last time, the procession of quaestors, patricians, and consulars set off in the direction of the Placidia Palace, led by the illustrious Belisarius, who is not without repugnance involved in these theological exercises. The pope presented them with a copy of his sentence, which was very fully justified; but, as they suspected that its content was hardly favorable to the court's undertakings, they refused to receive it officially and urged Vigilius to have it carried to the palace himself by one of his clerics. This advice was followed; But Justinian did not want to receive the Pope's envoy, because, he said, either the sentence is contrary to the three chapters and then it is useless, since Vigilius spoke in this direction a long time ago, both orally and in writing; or it is favorable to them, and then he has contradicted himself and his current opinion should not be taken into account.

There was, between the pincers of the imperial dilemma, a middle ground that Vigilius, or rather Pelagius, his skilled advisor, had managed to discern. The doctrine of Theodore of Mopsuestia, evidently Nestorian, indirectly condemned at Ephesus and Chalcedon, could be sacrificed, and even had to be, since the question was posed with such insistence. Thus, Vigilius had begun

his exposition with a formal and detailed condemnation of sixty propositions taken from the works of the famous doctor. As for himself, the pope took refuge behind the ecclesiastical custom of neither condemning nor rehabilitating the dead and of deferring, on their final condition, to the decision of the sovereign judge. Ibas and Theodoret, or rather their writings, the only ones called into question, were defended by the Council of Chalcedon, which saw no grounds for condemnation there and whose reputation could not fail to suffer from any attack on the honor of these figures.

Such is the summary and spirit of the famous document known as the *Constitutum* of Vigilius. It was signed, after the Pope, by sixteen bishops, mostly Latin, and countersigned by three Roman deacons: Theophanes, Archdeacon, Pelagius, and Peter. Since Justinian did not receive it, it was not read at the council. The emperor merely presented to the assembly, at the session of May 26, a collection of documents in which Pope Vigilius had spoken in favor of the condemnation. After it had been read, his representative communicated an imperial decree stating that the name of Vigilius should be removed from the diptychs, without prejudice to the union with the Apostolic See. This decision was based on the Pope's procrastination and his refusal to attend the Council, without any specific reference to the text of his *Constitutum*. The Council accepted the emperor's reasons, with its subtle distinction between the Pope and the Holy See: Vigilius' name was erased from the diptychs.

A few days later, on June 2, a final session was held where the verdict on the substance of the debate was rendered. It was worded in a long decree and concluded with fourteen anathemas. Then the assembly broke up, having faithfully served the hatred of Theodore Askidas and the pretentious susceptibilities of Justinian, but having gravely offended the Holy See and sowed the seeds of fatal quarrels and endless schisms in the Western Church.

All that remained to be settled were personal matters. Justinian took charge of this without a council. The decrees of the holy assembly were transformed into imperial law and presented to all the bishops for signature. In the East, there was little opposition. A bishop from the Lebanon region, Alexander of Abila, is mentioned, who refused to sign. He perished a few weeks after the council in an earthquake that shook Constantinople. Those devoted to the emperor did not fail to claim this death as divine punishment; but their opponents claimed that the catastrophe was a sign of God's wrath against the cowards who had abandoned the Council of Chalcedon.

The Bishop of Carthage, Reparatus, had long since been relegated to a monastery and replaced in his seat. One of his deacons, Primasius, had been forcibly installed in his place and worked ardently to have the condemnation of the three chapters accepted in Africa. Even before the council, Firmus, primate of the Numidian bishops, had yielded. He died miserably on his return from Constantinople. Another Primasius, bishop of Hadrumetum, who had signed the *Constitutum* and refused to attend the council, was also confined in a convent; but when he learned that Boethus, the old primate of Byzacena, had died, he yielded, hoping to succeed him. Other African prelates, clerics, or monks, including Victor, bishop of Tunnunum, and Liberatus, deacon of Carthage, were sent into exile, most of them deep into Egypt. The same fate befell Frontinus, Bishop of Salona and Metropolitan of Dalmatia, who was quickly given a successor.

The Pope and his clerics were also dealt with. Rusticus, nephew of Vigilius, already deposed by his uncle for some years and very ardent for the three chapters, was sent to the Thebaid, with an African monk named Felix. There he employed his enforced leisure writing, against the Acephali, a treatise that has not come down to us in its entirety. The work is in the form of a dialogue; it is possible that it was read with interest at the time. It is not, moreover, the

only work from the pen of Rusticus. We have a Latin translation of the Council of Chalcedon. It is clear that, whatever his uncle may have said, he did not only read novels. Sarpatus, one of his colleagues, was thrown into prison, along with Pelagius, who could not fail to be thought of before all the others, for it was he who had evidently supported Vigilius and even turned him somewhat at the last moment. But Pelagius was a shrewd man of great resourcefulness, with whom the emperor did not intend to quarrel without remission. So, he was allowed to vent his anger in a series of protests and treaties in favor of the three chapters, in his name and in the name of his colleague Sarpatus.

Isolated again, terrified by so much violence, tired of a hopeless struggle, and finally burdened by a painful illness that would make the prospects of exile and imprisonment seem bleaker for him than for others, Vigilius gave in. He also had reason to fear that the imperial authorities, now reinstalled in Rome, would succeed in replacing him in his seat. As the council was assembling, news had reached Constantinople that Narses had broken, in a final battle, the supreme effort of the Goths to regain power in Italy. Nothing could swing Justinian's fortunes back to Rome, nothing could prevent him from imposing on the Roman clergy, either during Vigilius' lifetime or after his death, a pope devoted to his religious policy and the council's decisions. So, what was the point of being persuaded? Vigilius probably did not consider that he could have left it to a successor to make the appropriate concessions and remained, for his part, firm and unshakeable in an attitude that had cost him so dearly. He chose, among the various opinions he had successively defended, the one that seemed most favorable to his personal interests,[57] and no doubt also to those of his flock, long since deprived of a pastor. On December 8, 553, he addressed a first

[57] The reservations made by the Emperor and the Council seem to have put the interests of the Holy See out of question. Vigilius could have believed himself, in this regard, safe from any concern.

adhesion to Patriarch Eutychius, soon followed (February 26, 554) by a solemn declaration in favor of the condemnation of the three chapters.

It was a case of being brief. But whether it was imposed upon him or in accordance with custom, Vigilius did not limit himself to retracting; he undertook to refute himself, or rather to refute the reasons that had been put forward for ten years in favor of the three chapters.[58] His deacons Tullianus and Peter drew up a long document for him, the title of which has not come down to us, so it is not clear to whom it was addressed.

By this step, the Roman Church found itself in agreement with the Eastern Council, and the union of the churches was reestablished in law. I say in law because, while in Africa and Illyria the emperor succeeded in breaking the resistance, it was not the same in Italy; and as for the regions of the West that were outside the Empire, the Council of Constantinople was admitted only very indirectly, as we shall soon see.

Having returned to Justinian's favor, Vigilius took the opportunity to persuade him to finally give a footing to Italian affairs, so deeply troubled for twenty years. On August 13, an imperial constitution known as the Pragmatic Sanction appeared, intended to regulate the situation of property, the organization of the courts, the provisioning of Rome, and to meet the necessities created by so many vicissitudes. It was good policy for Pope Vigilius to return to Italy with his hands full of the emperor's gifts. Old hatreds and new oppositions would thus be disarmed. It was only after obtaining this important charter that he set out, probably in the spring of the following year.

He was not supposed to go as far as Rome. The cruel illness from which he suffered forced him to stop in Syracuse, where it carried

[58] See in *Histoire des conciles* d'Hefele (éd. française, vol. III, p. 594 et suiv.), the assessment of this refutation.

him off on June 7, 555.[59] The clerics who accompanied him brought his body back to Rome. But instead of placing it, as was customary, in the portico of St. Peter's, he was buried on the Via Salaria, in the small church of St. Silvester, next to his predecessor Marcellus, who had been buried there for two and a half centuries.[60] No doubt, those charged with rendering his funeral honors had their reasons for choosing this basilica. The memory of the deceased pope was attached to the monuments of the Via Salaria, in particular to those of the cemetery of Pricilla, which he had repaired after the siege of Vitiges. But I cannot help suspecting that a movement of opinion arose to prevent the body of Vigilius from being placed among those of the pontiffs who rested at St. Peter's. There was a fear of disturbing in their final resting place Popes Leo, Simplicius, Gelasius, Hormisdas, and Agapitus, energetic defenders of the Council of Chalcedon and of the Roman tradition whose sacrifice so many people reproached their unfortunate successor for.

V

POPE PELAGIUS AND THE LEGACY OF VIGILIUS

If we are to believe Liberatus,[61] Theodore Askidas once said a significant and enlightening remark about the responsibilities for these sad events: "Pelagius and I should have been burned alive for the scandal we unleashed on the Church." But the events of this world do not serve morality. We do not know what happened to Theodore. As for Pelagius, after having, by his untimely zeal against

[59] *Ex multa adflictione, calculi dolorem habens, defunctus est Vigilius* (*Lib. pont.*, n. 108). — The day of his death is marked with the greatest precision in the Verona catalogue. See my edition of *Liber pontificalis*.
[60] *Lib. pontif., l. c.*
[61] *Brev.*, 24.

Origen, aroused the resentment of the implacable Archbishop of Caesarea, after having sustained for ten years the struggle in favor of the three chapters, pushed the West against the East, the Roman Church against the empire, after having stirred up storms and catastrophes, he was going, as punishment, to become pope, and this in a pacified Italy, in a Rome reborn to its former splendor.

Things, it is true, initially seemed to take a different turn. Not only did Pelagius refuse to accept the council and to rally to the adhesion that the pope gave him, but, deep in the prison where he had allowed himself to be locked up (it was undoubtedly some monastery), he began to write libel after libel against the new decrees. These writings were incendiary, it must be said, only from a religious point of view. The most clement emperor, far from being attacked directly, was not even touched. The pope, on the other hand, found himself very badly treated. He was portrayed as a fickle and venal old man, to whom his "satellites," that is, the clerics of his council, dictated and had signed whatever they wanted. The first of these protests, directed specifically against the last *Constitutum*, that of 554, had been written, Pelagius tells us, at the request of the emperor himself; it was a sort of justification against Vigilius, who threatened to condemn him;[62] another, also written by Pelagius, but in the name of his colleague Sarpatus, imprisoned with him, had closely followed the previous one. In a third work, divided into six books and of greater length, Pelagius undertook the council itself, of which the court had sent him either the entire minutes, or only the part concerning the discussion of the three chapters, sessions V and VI in particular. This work was composed towards the end of the year 554 or the beginning of the following year.[63] The author

[62] *Neues Archiv.*, vol. V, p. 561.

[63] It is this work, previously unpublished, whose nature I recognized in the description of a manuscript from the library of Orléans, published by Mr. Léopold Delisle, *Notice sur plusieurs manuscrits de la bibliothèque d'Orléans*, in vol. XXXI, part 1 of the *Notices et extraits des manuscrits*, p. 7 of the offprint. Cf. *Bulletin critique*, vol. V, p. 96.

has made extensive use of Facundus' work, as he expressly acknowledges, and he uses the *Constitutum* of 553 with a familiarity that was undoubtedly authorized by a right of paternity.

This literature later caused Pelagius a lot of trouble; it was not through his efforts that anything of it was preserved.

The death of Vigilius was a rather serious setback for Justinian. The authority of his age, the memory of his misfortunes, the long resistance he had put up before yielding, the remedial measures he had promoted and whose official documents he brought to Italy, were, for the deceased pope, titles to the respect and trust of his flock. Much could be hoped for from him to bring back the dissidents. A successor was not easy to find. In Rome, it is true, some sympathizers pointed to a priest named Mareas, who, in his later years, had led the clergy in the absence of the pope. He is known only through his epitaph,[64] which celebrates his generosity towards the poor, his constancy in defending the Church's tradition regarding the rites of confirmation, and, if I understand correctly, the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon:

> Præsulis in vicibus clausisti pectora sæva,
> Ne mandata patrum perderet ulla fides.

This was not exactly a claim to Vigilius' legacy; nevertheless, Mareas' panegyrist represents him as the only one worthy of the pontificate:

> Te quærunt omnes, te sæcula nostra requirunt
> Tu fueras meritus pontificale decus.

But, even if Mareas had been a candidate as agreeable to Justinian as to the author of his epitaph, as he died before the end of August 555, it was necessary to think of another.

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[64] De Rossi, *Bull.*, 1869, p. 20.

The emperor had always had great esteem and friendship for Pelagius. Of all the Roman clerics who had passed through the court, he was by far the most intelligent and energetic. His devotion to the empire and the emperor had not been shaken by the religious controversies of recent years. In Rome, the memory of his charity during the siege of 546 and the important role he had played in the catastrophe it led to must have been preserved. He was obviously the right man. Why had he decided to throw himself into the opposition and make outbursts that made him impossible?

Impossible was a word that Justinian rarely used, personally. He persisted in making Pelagius a pope and set about converting him first. He succeeded. Here, some people would not fail to invoke the divine grace that touched the obstinate heart of the Roman deacon, enlightened his mind, and showed him a sentence inspired by the Holy Spirit in a decree against which he had been battling for ten years, despite the emperor, the council, and the pope. But I would believe I would profane divine grace by attaching it to Justinian's lips and the road to Damascus by seeking it in the labyrinth of the three chapters. Justinian made Pelagius understand that he alone could be pope, but that, to become pope, one had to follow the path traced by Vigilius and condemn what he had condemned. Pelagius didn't need much reasoning to understand this. He complied.

I won't hold it against him. An inner voice tells me that, if I had lived at that time, I might have made some difficulty. But I wouldn't have been the only possible pope. At the point things stood, there was no other course to take for a pope than the one Pelagius took. What, in short, were the drawbacks of his decision? Theodore of Mopsuestia is certainly a heretic; if he was not called into question at the Council of Ephesus and that of Chalcedon, it was because he was already dead. If he had lived at that time, he would have been infallibly drawn into the disaster of Nestorius, who was much less responsible than he for the errors that were condemned at that time. By signing, or rather by drafting, the *Constitutum* of 553;

Pelagius had indirectly repudiated the doctrine of Theodore. The anathema pronounced against him clarified ideas about his system a little more clearly, but it did not affect his ultimate situation, which was immune from any ecclesiastical sentence. As for Ibas and Theodoret, whose only crime was to have remained too long attached to condemned men and to have mistreated Saint Cyril, it was undoubtedly very hard to single them out for a fault that so many people had committed before them and with them. What would not Saint Jerome, Saint Epiphanius, Saint Theophilus of Alexandria,[65] and Saint Cyril himself have deserved in this regard? It is doubtless plausible that the great Chrysostom had forgiven his persecutors. Ibas and Theodoret could do the same, for the good of the Church, and tolerate that some of their writings be treated as impious. Saint Paul had indeed consented to be anathematized for the spiritual benefit of his brothers.

Pelagius took up his pen, signed the decrees he had attacked a year earlier, and set out to take over the government of the Church of Rome. If the spirits of Theodoret and Ibas needed atonement, it would be provided. The defender of the three chapters, having become pope, descended one Calvary to ascend another.

Having landed in Italy, the emperor's candidate found gloomy faces everywhere. No one wanted to hear anything about him. His personal valor, his brilliant merits, all were forgotten. It was worth having defended the Council of Chalcedon so much only to abandon it out of ambition! Away with the deserter of apostolic doctrine, the man unfaithful to Saint Leo and his protégés! Away with the intruder who came to defile the immaculate seat of Saint Peter, just as Primasius had profaned that of Saint Cyprian at Carthage! A few

[65] It is not I who canonizes Theophilus. His name appears in the calendar of the Coptic Catholic Church (Nilles, *Kalendarium manuale*, vol. II, Innsbruck, 1881, p. 647). This is perhaps surprising, for it is quite likely that this patriarch died, and for good reason, outside of the communion of the Pope: but he seems to have been pardoned quite early. In the fifth century, Saint Theophilus is often mentioned.

officials and a few compliant clerics were found to welcome him at the Lateran and give him a mock election. But all right-thinking people, the remnants of the aristocracy, the monks, people reputed to be wise and truly religious, declared that it was necessary to abstain, and indeed they abstained.[66] The Italian episcopate was of the same mind; so, when it was time to proceed with the ordination, although they scoured the peninsula, they could not even recruit the three bishops whose presence was required by the canons. Only two, those of Perugia and Ferentino, lent their assistance; it was necessary to have the Bishop of Ostia, the Pope's ordinary consecrator, represented by a priest.[67]

[66] *Monasteria et multitudo religiosorum, sapientium et nobilium subduxerunt se a communione ejus* (*Lib. pont.*, n 109); cf. Pelagius' profession of faith, delivered at Saint Peter's (Migne, *P. L.*, vol. LXIX, p. 399).
[67] *Lib. pontif., l. c.*

The ceremony was performed in this paltry setting, under the protection of Narses and his officers, on Easter Sunday, April 16, 556.[68] Pelagius solemnly read a skillfully written profession of faith,[69] in which he declared his attachment to the four councils, and especially to the Holy Council of Chalcedon, and his zeal in defending the doctrine expressed in the letters of Popes Celestine, Xystus, Leo, and their successors down to John II and Agapitus. He taught everything they had taught; all those they had received as Orthodox he also received, "and especially the venerable bishops Ibas and Theodoret." Not the slightest word about Pope Vigilius, the

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[68] I am obliged to give some explanations here about this date and about the date of Pelagius' death, which I place on March 4, 561, contrary to the usual chronology, according to which he was ordained in 555 and buried in 560. Pelagius served for 4 years, 10 months, and 18 days, according to his epitaph, in agreement with the best papal catalogues. Moreover, he died on March 2, 3, or 4, according to the same epitaph, the most authoritative manuscripts of the *Liber pontificalis*, and a chronicle from Ravenna, from the sixth century, used by Agnellus (ed. Waitz, *SS. rerum Langol*, p. 331). Now, between June 7, 555, the certain date of Vigilius's death, and the first days of March 560, there is no place to place the 4 years, 10 months, and 18 days of Pelagius's pontificate. We must therefore go back one year and have him die in 561. By going back 4 years, 10 months, and 18 days from March 4, 561 (*IIII non. mart*, is the lesson of the epitaph), we arrive exactly at April 16, 556, which is a Sunday, and even Easter Sunday. This coincidence provides a verification. Moreover, the chronology of the following pontificates does not raise any serious objection to this system. There is one. However, in the correspondence of Pelagius himself, there is a document dated, according to the editions, February 15, 556. This is the letter to the bishops of Annnonarian Tuscia, which will be discussed later, sent on the *XV kal. mart. anno XV post. cons. Basilii.* If this date were reproduced exactly, the letter in question would be the oldest of all those of Pope Pelagius. Now it should be noted that it contains no allusion to the beginning of a pontificate, while, in a letter dated July 4, 556, Pelagius notifies the Bishop of Arles, Sapaudus, of his accession as very recent; his letter of December 11, 556 of the same year is said by himself to have been sent in *ipsis statim ordinationis nostrae principiis* (*Neues Archiv*, vol. V, p. 538). We can therefore accept the easy correction from *anno XVI* to *anno XV* and thus remove the objection drawn from the letter to the Tuscan bishops. In this way, Pelagius' pontificate falls between April 16, 556, and March 4, 561. The circumstances and the analogy of the following pontificates are sufficient to explain the length of the vacancy of the Holy See between Vigilius and him.

[69] Migne, *P. L.,* vol. LXIX, p. 399.

Council of 553, Justinian and his edicts. The Pope was content to allude to the exaggerated zeal of a few, a zeal that was not according to science, which those present, better informed, should strive to enlighten.

Once consecrated and installed, Pelagius set about making peace around him, and, to begin with, he took care of his church in Rome. It was not difficult for such a skillful and determined man to put an end to the opposition of the clergy; but it was important to impress the people with an imposing demonstration. A grand procession was announced[70] at which the Pope made every effort to give such guarantees that all doubts about his conduct and intentions could not fail to disappear. His proclamation of Easter Day had already made a salutary impression. Therefore, people hastened to the Basilica of Saint Pancras,[71] indicated as the starting point of the litany.

Narses was there with his staff and the retinue of authorities. He placed himself beside the Pope and they marched with great pomp to the Basilica of St. Peter. There, before an immense multitude, Pelagius ascended the ambo; the Cross of the Lord and the Book of the Gospels were held above his head, and in this state, he swore, with the most terrible oaths, that he was innocent of the treasons of which he was accused. At the same time, he protested that the reign of simony was over; that, in promotion to the dignities of the Church, consideration would no longer be given to anything other than the candidates' abilities and morals.

The Romans were satisfied, and the pope was now able to govern his church as if nothing had happened.

It cannot be denied that his profession of faith was a little clever; in Constantinople, this extraordinary way of condemning the three

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[70] *Lib. pontif., l. c.*

[71] Saint Pancras had a reputation for avenging the violation of oaths: *Valde in perjuris ultor*, says Gregory of Tours (*Gl. mart.,* 39). Perjurers could not approach his tomb; they were seized by the demon or struck down before even touching the gates (*l. c*).

chapters, by canonizing Ibas and Theodoret and remaining silent about Theodore of Mopsuestia, would undoubtedly have been little appreciated. But Justinian was far away,[72] and especially the vigilant Askidas. Narses, for his part, only asked for peace. However, Latin ears would not have tolerated any more; and Pelagius, after all, was the pope, that is to say, the man most qualified to interpret the conciliar conventions. Despite his precautions, he did not disarm all the resentment. From the depths of their retreats, the fanatic Victor of Tunnunum and his colleague Facundus hurled bloody epigrams at him. Facundus, in particular, made him the leader of a sect, for which his Hellenic erudition provided him with a somewhat bizarre name: Necrodioctes, otherwise known as *the Undertakers*.[73]

What use would intelligence be if it were not used to extricate oneself from such difficulties? The approach Pelagius had just inaugurated in Rome was intended to rally the entire West, less Africa and Dalmatia, where Justinian himself proceeded with the usual brutality of civil power when it interferes in matters of this nature. The Pope considered himself to have signed for everyone and did not demand an explicit condemnation of the three chapters from any Italian, Frankish, or Spanish bishop. The persons who had been implicated were Eastern bishops; their books, written in Greek, did not threaten to pervert the West. There had therefore been, theoretically, only an internal question of the Eastern Church, undoubtedly serious and one that could not have been resolved without the consent of the Western Church. But it was understood that in such a case, the latter was sufficiently represented by the

[72] Pelagius had left behind in Constantinople a trusted man, his old friend and fellow exile, the deacon Sarpatus, who now managed the nunciature at the Placidia Palace. But Sarpatus was bored at court and complained about his health. "Come back," Pelagius wrote to him. "We are both old: these fatigues are no longer appropriate for your age. An apocrisiarius cannot be absent for an hour from the imperial palace. Such subjugation is not compatible with your infirmities." (Jaffé, 1035).

[73] Facundus, *Epistola fidei catholicæ*, in Migne, *P. L.*, t. LXVII,p. 867 et suiv.; Victor, Chronic, ad ann. 558.

Pope and that the Pope was not obliged to give him public accounts of the details of his conduct.

There was only one thing to do from then on: to remain in communion with the Roman Pontiff, leaving him the responsibility for what he believed he should do, unless, if one felt any concern on this point, one could ask him for explanations himself.

Pelagius therefore did not impose any signatures contrary to the three chapters. However, he was inflexible on the question of communion. Italy was then divided into four metropolitan or primatial obediences. First, there was the diocese of Rome, comprising all the peninsular provinces from Tuscia and Flaminia, that is, from Luni and Ravenna, with the three islands of Corsica, Sardinia, and Sicily. The two metropolitan circumscriptions of Milan and Aquileia divided northern Italy as far as the Frankish border, leaving out the province of Emilia. This formed a fourth circumscription, but without a metropolitan taken from the ranks of its episcopate. The bishops of Emilia were subject to the see of Ravenna, which did not enjoy, like those of Milan and Aquileia, the privilege of autocephaly, but fell under the pope's metropolitan diocese.

In this one, Pelagius encountered little difficulty. Many seats were vacant; he naturally ordained only docile people. Only the Bishop of Fossombrone, Paulinus, offered resistance. The Pope ordered him to retire to a monastery, and when he decided to escape and take refuge in Ravenna, Pelagius applied to the magistrates to have him arrested and returned, *manu militari*, to the forced residence he had assigned him. He also learned that the bishops of northern Tuscany, of what was called Annonarian Tuscia, were insisting on refraining from mentioning his name in the diptychs. Such an attitude was intolerable. Pelagius wrote[74] to them immediately about having to conform to ancient custom and consider him the legitimate pope. To facilitate their requested

[74] Jaffé, 939; Migne, *P. L.*, vol. LXIX, p. 397. For the date, see above p. 428.

accession, he sent them his profession of faith, placing great emphasis on Chalcedon and Saint Leo, but still saying nothing about the three chapters. Those, he added, who had any qualms or desired further explanations need only come to Rome, where they would be given complete satisfaction.

These oppositions were easy to overcome, and just as easily, a few priests, deacons, or monks who allowed themselves to cause scandal here and there by invoking inappropriate scruples were overcome. In northern Italy, the opposition was even more serious, so serious in fact that Pelagius, despite his decisiveness and authoritarian actions, was unable to overcome it.

By 552, Macedonius had been Bishop of Aquileia for over twenty years. As for the see of Milan, whose incumbent, Dacius, had been retired to Constantinople since 539, it became vacant around the middle of 552. The Byzantine generals, despite the worries of war, ensured that the election fell on a candidate acceptable to Constantinople and, after securing the emperor's consent, they proceeded with the ordination.[75] The newly elected was named Vitalis. He was consecrated according to custom by his colleague from Aquileia. Ancient tradition would have required that the ceremony be celebrated in Milan; but the difficulties of the times made it necessary to do it in Ravenna. Vitalis had no inclination to condemn the three chapters, and if it was accepted by Justinian, it was because they were then going through a period of appeasement and concessions, following the return of Vigilius from his asylum at Saint Euphemia.

After Pelagius's installation, the two bishops of Milan and Aquileia held back and broke off all communion with the Roman Church. When Macedonius died in 557, a monk named Paulinus was elected as his successor,[76] who was ordained, contrary to custom, in Milan and not in Aquileia. This ordination, celebrated by a bishop who did

[75] Jaffé, 1038; Migne, *l. c*, p. 395.
[76] Jaffé, 1018, 983; Migne, *l. c*, p. 397: cf. p. 411.

not have communion with the pope, was considered null in Rome, and the schism only became more serious.

It was undoubtedly this schismatic attitude of the northern metropolises that had led the bishops of Annonarian Tuscia to the beginnings of a revolt. It also had some influence in Emilia. But the Bishop of Ravenna, Agnellus, devoted to the Pope and imperial policy, managed to bring back the dissidents in his constituency, and the schism did not last very long in this region.

It was already a great deal that it was strengthening in the metropolitan dioceses of Milan and Aquileia. With more zealous officials, the Pope would undoubtedly have overcome it quite easily. But Narses, who exercised a sort of viceroyalty in Italy, was hardly concerned, despite his piety, with intervening in ecclesiastical quarrels. Perhaps the moment seemed ill-chosen to him for forceful actions capable of upsetting the population and detaching them from the newly reestablished imperial regime. His lieutenants, the patricians John and Valerian, one in Veneto, the other in Milan, imitated his reserve and sought to proceed gently.

This was not to the Pope's liking. He therefore continued to write to them and send deputies to urge them to take action. The little they did to please him led them into some rather unpleasant disagreements. The prelates of Venetia, very proud of their autonomy, were becoming increasingly exalted. Their leader, the Bishop of Aquileia, was already assuming the title of Patriarch, which was rather frowned upon in Rome.[77] When the patrician John pretended to insist on their rallying to Catholic unity, they excommunicated him. Great was the disappointment of this general officer, who was a good Christian and did not intend to be deprived of the offices of the Church. Valerian intervened on his behalf to persuade the stubborn Paulinus. This action greatly displeased

[77] *New Archiv*, vol. V, p. 541. "Peto utrum aliquando in ipsis generalibus quas veneramur synodis, vel interfueritquispiam Venetiarum, *ut ipsi putant*, atque Histriæ patriarca, vel legatos aliquando direxerit." (Letter from Pelage to the patrician John.)

Pelagius. The Pope thought that John must be very happy to be excommunicated by schismatics; he was all the more certain of being within the bosom of the Church. However, to calm his scruples, he had a chaplain sent to him by the Bishop of Ravenna.[78]

According to him, all this moderation was good for nothing. The Bishop of Milan and the so-called Bishop of Aquileia should be seized and sent under heavy guard to Constantinople. As for their followers, they should not be allowed to meet in council and presume to judge what already existed. If they had difficulty accepting communion from the Pope, they should send them to Rome or come there themselves for clarification.[79]

It may perhaps be found that this was rushing things and that this recommendation to seize the recalcitrant archbishops was somewhat unseemly coming from a man who, in short, had for ten years pursued the same campaign that he now forbade others. This was what was thought in Italy, and Pelagius' writings against the council and against Vigilius were circulating there, accompanied by less than kind observations. The opponents of Emilia cited a letter which they said had been written to them by him before his elevation to the pontificate and which was hardly in accordance with his current principles. He felt obliged to explain this in a letter addressed to a certain Symeonius, *vir illustris*.[80] The letter rumored to be apocryphal; But it was true that he had written a *Refutatorium*

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[78] Jaffé, 1009, 1011, 1012, 1018 ; *Neues Archiv*, vol. V, p. 550, 553 ; Migne, *l. c*, p. 396.

[79] Jaffé, 1018; Migne, *l. c*, p. 397.

[80] Jaffé, 972; *Neues Archiv*, vol. V, p. 561: "Obliti sumus de epistola tibi scribere, quam se Æmiliæ episcopi a nobis directam de Constantinopoli habere confingunt, quod sublimitas tua noverit esse falsissimum. Nec aliquam epistolam, quando in causa trium capitulorum in diaconatus officio agebamus, ad Italiam misimus; sed hoc quod fecimus, nec negavimus nec aliquando negamus, id est: refutatorium ad papam Vigilium, quando medamnare volebat, et sex libros in defensionem capitulorum clausus (clausos *cod.*) per diversa monasteria et exilia, non habens codicem, sed quæ mihi scripto diversi hæretici, qui scandala semper Ecclesiæ generare moliuntur, secrete mittebant. Præter (propter *cod.*) istas cartas, si epistolam meam in diaconatu de ista causa factam aliquis se habere dicit, aperte mentitur."

ad papam Vigilium and a treatise in six books to defend the three chapters. He did not hide it; he had never hidden it; but these works had been composed in the solitude of monasteries and places of exile, without the aid of books, with the help of a few memoirs passed on to him by heretics.

Pelagius had a short memory here. Books, at least the most important ones, had not failed him in what he called his prison (*custodia*). As for presenting himself as the victim of heretical suggestions, he being so well informed on a question that was otherwise not very complicated in itself, this was a polemical device he could have avoided. He soon had the opportunity to present his true excuse, when the bishops of the Frankish empire put him in the hot seat on this subject.

The Bishop of Arles, Sapaudus, had been in office for several years at the time of Pelagius' accession, and there had been no time or opportunity to solicit for him the honors that the popes ordinarily granted to the holders of his see, the pallium and the title of apostolic vicar in Gaul.[81] Pelagius, eager to use the influence that this grant of honors could bring him at a critical moment, was the first to write to the Bishop of Arles, inviting him to get in touch with him.[82] Sapaudus did not need to be asked twice; by September 556, his envoys were in Rome. But custom dictated that the request for the pallium be made by the king to whom the city of Arles obeyed, and Childebert, before embarking on such a step, needed reassurance about the rumors circulating about the new pope. He therefore dispatched a high official, Rufinus, *vir magnificus*, to ask him either for an assurance that he had not deviated in any way from the doctrine of Saint Leo or for a detailed profession of faith. In a

[81] On the purely honorary nature of this function, in the times in which we live, see Lœning, *Geschichte des deutschen Kirchenrechts*, vol. II, p. 79 et suiv.

[82] Jaffé, 940; Migne, *l. c.*, p. 401. The other letters relating to this affair are found in the collections following this one.

letter dated December 11,[83] Pelagius gave the king the first of these two guarantees, declaring that he would anathematize anyone who deviated from the faith of Saint Leo and the Council of Chalcedon in a single syllable, a single word, or in any sense. He added that the slander spread against him was propagated by heretics, against whom the most merciful emperor had waged war in Constantinople and who were now spreading throughout the provinces. They were mainly Nestorians. They had succeeded in corrupting a few simple-minded bishops in Italy, who were not to be trusted (the metropolitans of Milan and Aquileia with their suffragans). It was from them (!!!) that he had suffered in Constantinople. As long as Empress Theodora lived,[84] he had feared for the faith. But Emperor Justinian would not tolerate anyone tampering with the teachings of Pope Leo and the Council of Chalcedon.

With these assurances, the ordinary negotiations for the granting of the pallium began immediately. A little later, the king having made further requests, the pope decided to send him a long and detailed profession of faith, in which there is not the slightest allusion to the latest quarrels, but only to a few propagators of false news against whom it is advisable to be on one's guard.[85]

Despite these protests, which the king evidently only provoked because the Frankish bishops urged him to do so, ecclesiastical opinion in Gaul remained distrustful. People continued to spread the unfortunate writings, to pit Pelagius the deacon against Pelagius the pope, and to wonder how, since the former had declared that faith would be lost if the three chapters were condemned, the latter had so readily accepted this.

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[83] Jaffé, 942; Migne, *l. c*, p. 402. Pagi is wrong to want to eliminate part of this letter: everything fits together perfectly.

[84] Theodora died in 548, shortly after the publication of the *Judicatum*.

[85] Jaffé, 946; Migne, *l. c*, p. 407.

It was necessary to take up the pen and the explanations,[86] "Why these recriminations," he wrote to Sapaudus. "When I defended the three chapters, was I not with the majority of the bishops? I changed my mind, it is true, but with that same majority. Did not Saint Peter yield to the fraternal correction of Saint Paul? Did not Saint Augustine write retractions? I was mistaken, I admit, but being still only a simple deacon, whose opinion should take precedence over that of the pontiffs. Now they have declared themselves. Africa, Illyria, the East with its thousands of bishops have condemned the three chapters. It is madness to deviate from such a sentence to follow a few peddlers of false news."

In this document, Pelagius confesses that he had once written a letter,[87] contrary to what he had stated, as we have seen above, to the *vir illustris* Symeonius. Perhaps, however, he only has in mind his *Refutatorium*, or his treatise in six books, which was to be preceded by some dedicatory epistle. But what seems strange is the way he speaks of this literary production. He wrote it, he says, "without defining anything, without knowing what opinion to follow, as a simple consultation." This is not the impression one gets when reading his treatise for all three chapters. Never has one been so clear, so decided in expressing an opinion. It is clear that Pelagius, since he became pope, no longer reread his book and that his efforts to forget it were crowned with success.

In concluding this letter to Sapaudus, he protests against two serious abuses which, in his opinion, the prelates of Gaul should have corrected before lecturing the Apostolic See: the elevation of lay people to the episcopate and the practice of distributing to the people an idol made of flour, which was received by each person according to their merits. Popes had long protested against

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[86] Jaffé, 978; *Neues Archiv*, vol. V, p. 536.

[87] "Quomodo ergo me post generale concilium culpare præsumunt de illa adhuc epistola, quam non definiendo aliquid, sed nesciens quid sequendum esset, consultando scripsi?" (*Neues Archiv*, *l. c.*)

episcopal ordination conferred on mere lay people. Although this procedure had produced bishops such as Saint Ambrose, Saint Germanus of Auxerre, and Saint Sidonius Apollinaris, it could lead to serious abuses. The other criticism seems bizarre. It relates, I believe, to the custom of arranging fragments of consecrated bread on the altar in such a way as to give them the shape of a human body. This rite was noted and condemned by a council held in Tours less than ten years after Pelagius' letter: Ut corpus Domini, in altari, non in imaginario ordine, sed sub crucis titulo componatur.[88]

The difficulties raised about Pelagius' books were specific to this pope and were to disappear with him. To restore peace to the Latin Church, while maintaining union with the Greek Church, Pelagius had decided not to demand explicit adherence from anyone to what had happened at Constantinople and even to remain silent as much as possible on the matter. When it was necessary to speak about it, he contented himself with saying two things: first, that he accepted the Council of Chalcedon without reservation and condemned any attempt to undermine it; second, that what had been accepted at Constantinople by the Holy See and the Emperor in no way harmed the Council. To this second statement, it was possible, as long as Pelagius was alive, to oppose the diametrically opposed opinion he had held before becoming pope. After his death (561), this difficulty disappeared. His successor, John III, and subsequent popes could not be accused of any prevarication. However, it continued to be claimed that, despite all Roman protests, Justinian had violated the Council of Chalcedon. In Gaul and Spain, this was not seen as a reason to break with the apostolic see. Relations between Rome and these two countries were infrequent, thanks to political circumstances; but what remained of them was not altered, at least

[88] Council of Tours of 567 (Hardouin, vol. III, p. 358) c. 3. — The custom of grouping the Eucharistic fragments in the form of a cross has been preserved in the Mozarabic liturgy. In the Greek church, a similar rite is observed, but much more complicated.

since the death of Pope Pelagius.[89] Only in Upper Italy was communion with the pope refused; the schism, once begun out of scruple, was prolonged out of obstinacy. The Lombard invasion soon complicated this situation by placing most of the dissidents beyond the reach of imperial officials.

The latter, moreover, only interfered in this affair halfheartedly and intermittently. With Justinian dead, his successor Justin II hastened to drop the condemnation of the three chapters,[90] and his successors imitated his indifference. Thus, the entire weight of the struggle fell on the Holy See. It lasted more than a century, with alternating conflicts and truces, diplomatic negotiations and violent repression.

Askidas could be satisfied with the fine revenge he had procured for Origen. The bitter enemy of the great Alexandrian doctor, the odious theologian of Mopsuestia, was marked, in the East at least, with an indelible stigma. The adversary of the Origenists, their denouncer, Pelagius, had been defeated and forced to burn what he worshipped. With him, the Roman Church, whose authority had momentarily prevailed against the influence of the Bishop of Caesarea, the Roman Church was humiliated, reduced to recanting and struggling to impose decrees passed in spite of itself.

Let us hasten to say it: the figure of Pelagius rises above these miserable quarrels. We already know what he was like in 546, amidst the horrors of the siege and famine, at the head of a population dejected and plunged into despair, facing the victorious and angered Totila. The same generosity, the same loftiness of

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[89] Gregory of Tours never mentions this affair. It is possible that it did not have much of an impact in France, except in the province of Arles and in the parts of Upper Italy that were annexed for a time to the Kingdom of Austrasia. In Spain, Saint Isidore appears to have known of it only through Victor of Tunnunum; that is enough to say what he thinks of it. Since the information of the African chronicler did not clash with any other memory in his work, it was because the Catholic bishops of Spain had been, until then, in complete ignorance of the concessions made by the Roman Church.

[90] See his decree in l'*Histoire ecclésiastique* d'Evagrius, V, 4.

character, the same vigor of hand are found in all the known acts of his all-too-short pontificate. This would be the time to study it in detail, in the light of recently discovered documents. But as we do not yet have the complete text, and since this memoir is already quite long, let us reserve the rest for another time, and content ourselves, finally, with collecting, in the epitaph dedicated to Pelagius, a contemporary impression of this man so controversial during his lifetime. I know that we must be wary of epitaphs; But there are some who agree with the truth; funeral tears are not all conventional. After a few pompous couplets, which dismiss the idea that not all is dead in Pelagius, the poor poet continues thus:

Rector apostolicæ fidei veneranda retexit
Dogmata quæ clari constituere Patres.
Eloquio curans errorum scismate lapsos
Ut veram teneant corda placata fidem.

Only one monument in Rome preserves the memory of Pelagius I. He had begun to build, on the Via Lata, near or on the site of a fourth-century basilica, a church in honor of the apostles James and Philip. His successor, John III, completed the work and inscribed only his own name on it. A couplet from his dedicatory inscription could apply to Pelagius, at least as well as to him.

Largior existens angusto in tempore præsul
Despexit mundo deficiente premi.

This is Pelagius' Calvary, his passion, his expiation if you will, in any case his sacrifice.

Sacravit multos divina lege ministros
Nil pretio faciens immaculata manus.

In other words, he performed many ordinations, of bishops, priests, deacons, and derived no profit from them. This seems quite simple: given the customs of the time, it was heroism. His biographer, in the *Liber pontificalis*, noted the same merit: Pelagius kept his hands clean of all simony, at a time when simony was traditional and almost considered good taste.

Captivos redimens, miseris succurrere promptus
Pauperibus numquam parta negare sibi;
Tristia participans, læti moderator opimus
Alterius gemitus credidit esse suos.

This is where the treasures that passed through these honest hands went. *Tristia participans! Alterius gemitus!* How much sadness, how much groaning, in those dire times when Rome was five times taken and retaken, when Italy, trampled by Goths, Greeks, and Franks, seemed to produce harvests only for fire and men only for massacre or slavery. All these sorrows echoed in the heart of Pelagius, all these wounds were healed by his hand. The Church did not see fit to surround his head with the halo of the saints. But history, without deluding itself about the vicissitudes of his troubled existence, without casting a veil over the contradictions of his theological career, is obliged to give him a place among the great popes of these later centuries, to introduce him alongside Agapitus and Gregory, illustrious pontiffs, an honor to the Christian family, of which they were the leaders, and to the Roman race of which they remain the last representatives.